

UNIVERSITY OF TAMPERE  
School of Management  
Higher Education Administration

# **Student Feedback Mechanisms**

The Case of a Vietnamese Public University

Master in Research and Innovation in  
Higher Education (MaRIHE), a joint  
programme provided by the Danube  
University Krems (Austria),  
University of Tampere (Finland), and  
Osnabrück University of Applied  
Sciences (Germany)

Master Thesis - June 2015

Supervisor: Dr. Jussi Kivistö

Long Tran Dinh Thanh

## **Abstract**

Student feedback system – a critical element of internal quality assurance – is of growing concern in the Vietnamese higher education community. Although, in 2008, the Ministry of Education and Training of Vietnam required all the universities in the country to put in place student feedback mechanisms, the practice of these tools are still unclear. This thesis focuses on exploring the actual execution of student feedback mechanisms inside Vietnamese state-funded universities and puts forward recommendations for further improvement. The twin research aims are met through an extensive study of relevant literature and an implementation of empirical work. The latter is carried out with a university through a qualitative case study using semi-structured interviews and documentary review. At the case university student feedback is executed through the use of two channels - student evaluation of teachers and meetings of students and university staff. Student participation in the first channel is compulsory and is seen as part of the procedures, so the input is generally of little value. The meetings in the second channel usually take place like a “blame game” rather than a constructive conversation. The main conclusions drawn from this research were that the utilization of student feedback mechanisms in the case university is regarded as bureaucratic procedures rather than a useful tool for training quality enhancement, and that both university staff and students are not well aware of the importance of student feedback to the quality management as a whole. The author recommends that the university’s board of management make efforts to raise the awareness of the importance of student feedback mechanisms, and to create formal guidelines and procedures which clearly define duties of each sub-unit of the university in tackling student feedback input.

## Table of contents

Abstract .....	i
List Of Abbreviations .....	v
List of Tables And Figures .....	v
Chapter 1: Introduction .....	1
1.1 Background .....	1
1.2 Research Gap.....	2
1.3 Research Questions and Objectives .....	2
1.4 Scope of the Study.....	3
1.5 Significance of the Study .....	3
1.6 Outline Structure .....	4
Chapter 2 – Literature Review .....	6
2.1 Introduction .....	6
2.2 Quality Assurance in the Context of Higher Education .....	6
2.3 Student Feedback in relation to Quality Assurance Process .....	8
2.4 Student Feedback Purposes and Levels .....	8
2.4.1 A Range of Purposes .....	8
2.4.2 Level and Users in relation to Purposes .....	10
2.5 Student Satisfaction.....	11
2.6 Instruments of Student Satisfaction Feedback.....	12
2.6.1 Institution-Level Satisfaction .....	12
2.6.2 Teacher Appraisal.....	15
2.7 Student Feedback Questionnaires .....	17
2.7.1 Timing .....	17
2.7.2 Response Rates .....	18
2.7.3 Incentive .....	19
2.7.4 Trust.....	19
2.7.5 Student Engagement.....	20
2.7.6 Paper versus Online Questionnaires .....	21
2.8 Student Representation.....	22
2.9 Actions And Decision-Making.....	24

2.9.1 Student Feedback Cycle .....	24
2.9.2 Actions.....	26
2.10 Publication And Dissemination.....	28
2.10.1 The Importance Of Feeding Back To Students .....	28
2.10.2 Content Of Publication .....	29
2.11 Emerging Issues .....	30
Chapter 3 - Research Methodology .....	31
3.1 Introduction .....	31
3.2 Research Design.....	31
3.2.1 Case Selection.....	32
3.2.2 Sampling Techniques .....	32
3.3 Data Collection.....	33
3.4 Framework For Data Analysis .....	34
3.5 Limitations .....	36
Chapter 4 – Student Feedback In Vietnamese Higher Education And The Case University .....	36
4.1 Introduction To Vietnam’s Higher Education.....	37
4.2 Quality Assurance In Vietnam’s HE Institution .....	40
4.3 Student Feedback Mechanisms In Vietnam’s HE Institution .....	41
4.3.1 Current Situations And Reasons Behind .....	41
4.3.2 Instruments Of Student Feedback.....	42
4.4 The Anonymous Case Study .....	43
Chapter 5 – Result and Discussion .....	46
5.1 Purpose of Student Feedback .....	46
5.2 Levels and Users of Student Feedback .....	50
5.3 Instruments Of Student Feedback At TCU .....	50
5.3.1 Student’s Evaluations Of Teaching.....	51
5.4 Actions And Decision-Making.....	63
5.5 Publication And Dissemination.....	67
5.6 Findings Conclusion.....	69
Chapter 6 - Conclusion and Implications.....	71
6.1 Revisiting The Research Questions.....	71

6.2 Implications for Further Improvement.....	72
6.2.1 Overall Suggestions.....	72
6.2.2 Specific Suggestions.....	73
6.3 Suggestions for future studies .....	75
6.4 Limitations of the study.....	75
References.....	77
Appendix 1- Interview Guide .....	83
Appendix 2- Interviewee List .....	89

## List Of Abbreviations

BOM	Board of management
HE	Higher education
HERA	Higher Education Reform Agenda
MOET	Ministry of Education and Training
QA	Quality assurance
SAS	Student and university staff
SET	Student evaluation of teaching
TCU	The case university

## List of Tables And Figures

Table 1: Level and users in relation to purposes	11
Table 2: Dimensions of student satisfaction	14
Table 3: Comparing question topics	16
Table 4: Levels and users of student feedback	46
Table 5: Overview of the two types of students and university staff meeting	60
Figure 1 Harvey (2003) student feedback cycle	24
Figure 2: Student feedback cycle in England and Northern England	25
Figure 3: Qualitative analysis framework (adapted from Biggam, 2011, p. 289)	35
Figure 4: Student evaluations of teaching cycle	64
Figure 5: Feedback cycle of Student and university staff meeting	67

# **Chapter 1: Introduction**

## **1.1 Background**

Traditionally, the “quality” issue, rooted in the industrial field, is not one of the concerns of the world of higher education (HE). However, since the development of the university sector and the spread of “consumerism”, quality has become critical in the eyes of policy-makers, university staff and students (Harvey, 2003). Additionally, there is a fast growing interest amongst academics in researches associated with quality in HE (Tight, 2012, p. 104). Hence, growing attention has been paid to student satisfaction feedback, which is an important element of quality assurance (QA).

Unfortunately, while QA in HE institutions is considered essential in many developed countries, it may not necessarily be the case for HE institutions in developing countries. Vietnam, the selected country for this study, for instance, is still in the initial stages of establishing awareness and building infrastructure needed for QA. As noted by Vallely and Wilkinson (2008, p. 4), “Vietnamese universities are not accountable to outside stakeholders”. The underdevelopment of quality assurance in the Vietnamese higher education is to some extent responsible for the low accountability of training. More specifically, in terms of student feedback, in most public universities, academic staff seldom make efforts in obtaining formal feedback from students on their satisfaction with the training programme (Lam & Hayden, 2010, p. 27). However, it is worth noting that recent reforms in Vietnam’s HE institutions reflect the government’s efforts in taking student feedback more seriously in an effort to enhance training quality at institutional level. In 2008, the Ministry of Education and Training (MOET) issued a regulation which requires Vietnamese public universities to conduct formal student feedback questionnaires on teaching performance. However, according to Pham (2010), the government needs to provide more guidelines for conducting student feedback as part of internal quality assurance. In other words, the above first step is just a legal stipulation rather than instructions and staff training provided regarding the execution of student feedback mechanisms. As a result, it is predictable that university staff, with their typically low expertise in quality assurance, may encounter difficulties in implementing student feedback mechanisms inside their university. Therefore,

conducting study on the actual execution of student feedback mechanisms in Vietnamese HE institutions is truly necessary.

## **1.2 Research Gap**

It can be observed that a considerable volume of literature has grown around the theme of the functions and characteristics of student feedback mechanisms in general and its practice inside universities. However, the majority of the studies were typically conducted in the context of HE institutions in developed countries. Previous researchers hardly examined the practice of student feedback in developing countries. Even in the studies targeting these countries, usually they merely concentrated on exploring the use of one or two instruments. Such approaches, unfortunately, have failed to address the practice of all student feedback instruments being used in a particular university. Additionally, given the fact the use of student feedback is relatively new in HE institutions in developing countries such as Cambodia, Vietnam and Thailand, there is a need to address how these universities execute student feedback mechanisms and how students and staff perceive the instruments. On the whole, it is clear that there is a research gap regarding the actual practice of student feedback mechanisms in HE institutions in countries with HE systems still in their relatively early stage of development.

## **1.3 Research Questions and Objectives**

The aim of this thesis is to gain an understanding of how student feedback mechanisms have been executed in Vietnamese state-funded universities, with a view to offering guidance on the way forward. The following research questions are formed to help achieve the aforementioned aim:

Research Questions:

*How have student feedback mechanisms been executed in the case university (TCU)?*

Sub-questions:

*(1) What are the student feedback mechanisms?*

*(2) What is the current practice of student feedback mechanisms in TCU?*



*(3) What recommendations can be made in order to improve the existing student feedback mechanisms of TCU?*

Accordingly, the research objectives will be as follows:

- (1) Identify and critically discuss the current issues of student feedback mechanisms.*
- (2) Explore the current execution of student feedback mechanisms in TCU.*
- (3) Formulate recommendations on the improvement of student feedback mechanisms.*

#### **1.4 Scope of the Study**

As explicitly expressed in the name of the thesis, the study focuses on investigating the current practices of student feedback mechanisms in a Vietnamese state-funded university. Accordingly, it is confined to exploring and explaining the current characteristics of the student feedback mechanisms, the emerging related issues, and the strengths and weaknesses of the student feedback mechanisms of the case university. More specifically, while the case university offers a wide range of training levels which include vocational, undergraduate, Master, PhD as well as short courses in foreign languages and professional skills, this study merely concentrates on the practice of student feedback process in undergraduate training programs. This is because undergraduate training is the principal area of training of TCU and because it is hoped that the concentration on one level of training will give the thesis more focus.

#### **1.5 Significance of the Study**

In terms of academic contribution, this study hopes to provide an opportunity to look at the issue of student feedback mechanisms, its instruments and procedures. Additionally, through the review of literature, the study provides a critical analysis of the current debates about various aspects of the student feedback mechanisms. On the other hand, although MOET required public universities to put in use some student feedback instruments seven years ago, how Vietnamese universities are actually utilizing this mechanism is still not known. As noted by Oliver et al. (2003), researches associated with quality assurance in Vietnam were poorly developed (as cited in Nguyen et al., p. 124). Hence, the outcome generated by this empirical study evidently demonstrates how student feedback mechanisms related to QA process have been executed in a

Vietnamese university. Ultimately, the empirical findings should help to shed light on the aforementioned research gap. The outcome of this research is fundamental to the on-going reforms in higher education regarding QA in Vietnam. As for policy-makers in Vietnam, the outcome of this research may lead to a better insight into the practice of student feedback mechanisms. From this new insight, the government may be able to make appropriate adjustments to their current actions and policies in order to further enhance the development of QA in Vietnam's HE institutions. As for university staff, they can utilize the result of this research as a useful benchmark for further development of the student feedback process in particular, and their internal QA as a whole.

## **1.6 Outline Structure**

### Chapter 1: Introduction

This chapter provides the reader with background information on student feedback mechanisms in the higher education world, including a brief introduction of the current situation of this issue in Vietnam, and an overview of how Vietnamese universities are executing these mechanisms. The significance and scope of this research are discussed and justified and the overall research objectives and individual research objectives are identified.

### Chapter 2: Literature Review

This chapter defines the term *quality assurance* (QA) in the HE context and discusses the connection between student feedback and QA. This part of the thesis also clarifies the functions of student feedback mechanisms, explores the features of these tools and captures the on-going debates about these issues (including response rate, timing and publication of student feedback results). Finally, it identifies the emerging issues from the review of literature.

### Chapter 3: Research Methodology

This chapter discusses and justifies the need for empirical research, the research design (a case study) and data collection techniques (centred on semi-structured interviews and documents review) adopted in the empirical collection of data for this study. Details of sampling techniques

are provided, together with a framework for analysis of the qualitative data. Finally, the limitations in terms of validity, reliability and transferability of the research methods are discussed,

#### Chapter 4: Student Feedback in Vietnamese Higher Education and in the Case University

This chapter contains a brief introduction of the Vietnamese higher education, followed by a description of the current situation of QA and student feedback in Vietnam. In addition, details of the case university are provided which include goals, vision, objectives, quality policy and existing student feedback mechanisms.

#### Chapter 5: Results and Discussion

This chapter reports on the findings of the case study. The results of the interviews and documents review are presented (under the themes: purposes of student feedback, levels and users of student feedback, instruments of student feedback at TCU, actions and decision-making, publication and dissemination). In each theme, the author describes, discusses, analyses and synthesizes the empirical findings and the findings from the literature review.

#### Chapter 6: Conclusions and Implications

This chapter revisits the research questions of this study. The findings are summarized and taken back to the specific research questions: *What are student feedback mechanisms? How are student feedback mechanisms executed in TCU?* Conclusions from this research are presented and taken back to the research questions, and, based on these conclusions, recommendations are made. The limitations of this work and suggestions for future studies are also highlighted.

## **Chapter 2 – Literature Review**

### **2.1 Introduction**

The study within this review of literature focuses on achieving the research objective (1) as established in sub-chapter 1.3 of the introductory chapter. This paper will adopt “Collecting and Using Student Feedback” developed by Brennan and Williams (2004) as a framework for analyzing the literature related to the topic. This work of Brennan and Williams is based on an HEFCE-funded project launched “by the Centre for Higher Education Research and Information, Segal Quince Wick steed Limited and National Opinion Polls on the collection and use of student feedback on quality and standards of learning and teaching in higher education.” This guide carefully examines, discusses and provides suggestions for a wide range of aspects regarding the use of student feedback. However, in order to guarantee the focus of the literature review regarding the research objectives, availability of the research sources and time, some of the aspects of this guideline will be omitted or adjusted, and a number of new aspects will be added. Accordingly, the literature review will first discuss the relationship between quality in higher education, quality assurance and student feedback. Next, purposes and characteristics of each student feedback instrument are thoroughly examined. Lastly, the final stages of student feedback mechanisms will be discussed.

### **2.2 Quality Assurance in the Context of Higher Education**

The term “quality assurance” first emerged in the industrial and commercial field. According to Frazer (1997, p. 10), quality assurance (QA) possesses the following features:

*Everyone in the enterprise has responsibility for maintaining the quality of the product or service.*

*Everyone in the enterprise has responsibility for enhancing the quality of the product or service.*

*Everyone in the enterprise understands, uses, and feels ownership of the systems which are in place for maintaining and enhancing quality*

*Management (and sometimes the customer or client) regularly checked the validity and viability of the systems for checking quality.*

Frazer (1997, p. 11) then tried to define QA in the higher education context as “a self-critical community of students, teachers, support staff and senior managers each contributing to and striving for continued improvement”.

Looking from a simpler perspective, Mansur et al. (1997, p. 157) defined QA as follows:

*“all activities needed to provide effective services for customers during the basic educational process and the full life cycle of the graduate”*

On the other hand, some scholars acknowledge that there is some distinctive difference between the industry and the education context which makes QA in higher education(HE) relatively ineffective in reducing all the weaknesses and imperfection of its product (Segers & Dochy, 1996, p. 119). Therefore, Segers and Dochy (1996, p. 119), taking a more conservative approach, defines QA in educational settings as “the intention and activities planned to assure quality”.

Critically examining all three aforementioned definitions, the author of this thesis observes that while Frazer’s definition underscores the involvement of many stakeholders in QA, it suffers from a lack of sense of action and time perspectives. QA is not just about evaluating the current quality performance of one university, one faculty or one teacher, it also encompasses a need to apply changes and action in improving the quality performance. This weakness has been complemented in Mansur et al.’s definition. However, both definitions lack consideration for the major differences between business and education context. To exploit the advantages and eradicate the disadvantages of the above 3 definitions, the author of this thesis attempt to produce his own definition and will use this definition when referring to quality assurance in higher education. The definition is as follows:

Quality assurance in higher education is the responsibility of students, teachers, support staff and senior managers to establish intention, awareness and activities for assuring effective services for students in their learning experiences in the institution.

This definition not only implies many issues regarding QA in higher education but also gives the audience clues about the empirical data of this study. The author will collect and analyze views

about the student feedback mechanism in relation to quality assurance process from a wide range of stakeholders in the proposed case study.

## **2.3 Student Feedback in relation to Quality Assurance Process**

As can be observed from Frazer's definition, the word "everyone" is repeated many times as a way to remind us that quality assurance is not just the business of university administrators and governments. And since students are the primary consumers of higher education, their input is undoubtedly needed. However, the student voice had not been taken seriously until some stages of development of the university were reached when there were concerns over training quality and when consumerism emerged (Harvey, 2003, p. 3). As students are regarded as primary consumers of higher education, Hill (1995, p. 10) highlighted that there is a need for higher education organizations to gather information on students' expectations, "not only during their time at university, but at the point of arrival and before, to manage students' expectations from enrolment through to graduation, in order to align them as closely as possible with what can be delivered by way of service quality, for the student evaluation process". Harvey (2003, p. 5) listed 3 advantages of student feedback: "it is the view of the person participating in the process, the learner; it is direct; and it can provide ratings on a range of items relevant to prospective students". Student feedback can help teachers to diagnose any problems in their teaching performance, and help administrators to enhance their decision-making process regarding the teaching (Richardson, 2005, p. 388). From the above findings from literature, it can be concluded that student is and should be a crucial part of quality assurance process.

## **2.4 Student Feedback Purposes and Levels**

### **2.4.1 A Range of Purposes**

It is evident that 'the student experience' has generated an impact on policies which relates to research and development funding in higher education (Sari, 2011, p. 657). In the UK, it is becoming common for individual teachers to use student feedback to improve the effectiveness of their teaching, and for employers to use student feedback as a basis for appointment, tenure or promotion (Richardson, 2005, p. 401). Rowley (2003, p. 144) also found that in the UK, student's evaluation can be used as benchmarks in universities, and to create new dimensions of

quality which can contribute to the institution's image in the market place. As for students' benefits, Rowley (2003, p. 144) observed that, by giving their views about their learning experiences, students can be more aware of the learning process and can enhance their learning competencies. However, this objective may only be realized as long as students fully understand the benefits that the whole quality assurance process can bring about.

In most US universities, student satisfaction is also used when considering whether or not lecturers are eligible for promotion or tenure (Williams, 2013, p. 99), or as guiding factors for staff development (Brennan & Williams, 2004, p. 11). Richardson (2005, p. 387) also found that student feedback can provide information for prospective students and other stakeholders in the selection of programmes or course units, and that it can bring about relevant evidence for research into the "processes of teaching and learning". David et al. (2010) found that more than half of the current and prospective students consider the rate of satisfaction in teaching as very reliable in choosing their institution (as cited in Sabri, 2011, p. 661). Grebennikov and Shah (2013, p. 301) observed that over the last ten years, the evaluation of student experience has gained great significance in Australian higher education. Internal surveys can help institutions to "promote highly performing areas and work on those needing improvement" and at the same time this offer students "an opportunity to influence decision-making in both academic and non-academic spheres of campus life" (Grebennikov & Shah, 2013, p. 301). Moreover, student feedback can also be used by institutions to understand the complexity of the total learning experience and to implement institutional leadership more efficiently in the quality enhancement process (Wiers-Jenssen et al., 2002, p. 183). To sum up, student feedback can be beneficial to a wide range of stakeholders in higher education. It can be used as a base on which to evaluate teachers' performance in order to improve teaching outcomes as well as promotion and tenure consideration. For students, they can have a better awareness of their learning process. It can also be used to identify strengths and weaknesses of a program or an institution. Based on this, university's management board and governments can initiate appropriate changes and courses of action.

## 2.4.2 Level and Users in relation to Purposes

As can be observed from the above-mentioned purposes of student feedback, level of student feedback is subject to the intended purposes and users. Below is the author's endeavor to give an overall picture of level, users and purposes regarding the student feedback from analyzing previous studies.

Level	Users	Purposes
Individual lecturer	+ Lecturers + Academic Managers	+ Self-assessment for further improvement + Tenure and promotion consideration
A module or unit	+ Lecturers + Academic Managers + Students	+ Self-assessment
A semester or year of study	+ Academic Managers + Students	+ Self-assessment for further improvement
A programme of study	+ Academic Managers + University's board of management + Ranking Agency / External Quality Assurance + Students	+ Self-assessment for further improvement + Ranking + Course Enrollment
A faculty	+ Academic Managers + University's board of management	+ Self-assessment for further improvement



An institution	+ Academic Managers + University's board of management + Ranking Agency / External Quality Assurance + Students	+ Self-assessment for further improvement + Ranking + Course Enrollment
----------------	--	---

Table 1: Level and users in relation to purposes

## 2.5 Student Satisfaction

What can be observed from previous studies is that the meaning and the use of the two terms “student feedback” and “student satisfaction” are varied. While some scholar equates the two terms, some argue that they should be separate. In this thesis, in order to prevent confusion, student satisfaction will be considered as one form of student feedback.

Harvey (2003, p. 3) described a number of instruments for obtaining students’ views, such as informal discussion or conversations, formal qualitative sessions, such as focus groups, facilitated discussions, questionnaires, representatives or consultative committees. According to Keane and Labhrainn (2005, p. 8), student feedback can also be collected through “student representation on staff-student committees and institutional bodies, structured group discussions and/or focus groups, one-to-one student interviews, e-mail, bulletin boards, students’ diaries and/or log books and informal comments”. Keane and Labhrainn (2005, p. 8) concluded that the method chosen will be subject to the “purposes, levels and context of the evaluation”. This paper will only focus on questionnaires as a major instrument for collecting student feedback.

Harvey (2003, p. 3) observed that questionnaire-based feedback is mainly in the form of ‘satisfaction’ surveys. Depending on the context and purposes, the survey may aim to achieve students’ view about one dimension or overall learning experience before, during and after students enroll in one HE institution. Before looking deeper into each type of satisfaction survey, the paper will critically review the definitions of the word “satisfaction”.

Apparently, student satisfaction is a notion which is simple to understand. Nevertheless, there are a large number of articles which try to define and quantify this concept from different

perspectives (Letcher & Neves, 2010, p. 3). In other words, student satisfaction has become a complex concept which has different meanings in different contexts and applications.

Originally, the term “satisfaction” came from the business field and the differences in definitions of student satisfaction resulted from whether researchers viewed students as employees or consumers (Odom, 2008). Hunt (1977, p. 49) associated satisfaction with “the favorableness of the individual’s subjective evaluation of the various outcomes and experiences associated with buying it or using it”. Since student satisfaction receives a great deal of concerns and interest from the education world, the term has been redefined in different ways. Elliott and Healy (2001, p. 2) described student satisfaction as a short-term attitude based on a valuation of their experience with the educational services provided. Student satisfaction is also defined as student’s evaluation of “the services provided by universities and colleges” (Wiers-Jenssen et al., 2002, p. 185). Unfortunately, these definitions, although having addressed the most important features of student satisfaction, suffer a lack of multiple perspectives. For instance, student satisfaction may also be affected after graduation. Specifically, student satisfaction can be subject to how students look back on their college time. The view of students during and after the study period may vary relatively. Moreover, the usefulness of the degree to the student’s career should be considered as an important part of student satisfaction. The author of this thesis attempts to convey the complex meaning of student satisfaction by taking various outcomes and experiences into consideration. In other words, student satisfaction can be defined as temporary views or attitudes of students towards the learning experiences and towards the outcomes of the educational products. This definition reflects the author’s choice in perceiving student as a consumer of higher education. It takes into account not only the learning experience but also the outcome of study in terms of career after graduation.

## **2.6 Instruments of Student Satisfaction Feedback**

### **2.6.1 Institution-Level Satisfaction**

Institution-level satisfaction is one of the instruments which institutions normally use to collect views of their students towards the total learning experience at the institution. As mentioned earlier, this level of student satisfaction can be used as guidance for university to improve their services, as well as helping prospective students to make informed decisions about their study

place. Dimensions used in institution-level satisfaction have been receiving a great deal of attention from researchers, scholars, institutions and governments. Haque et al. (2011) discovered a number of independent factors germane to university services which can impact student satisfaction. They include quality of teaching, student research facilities, library book collections and services, campus infrastructure, canteen facilities, space for group discussions, sport programs, ICT facilities, etc. Unfortunately, these factors seemed to be overlapping or unparalleled. Romanazzi et al. (2006) attempted to approach more specific factors such as dining halls, lecture halls, equipment, and even exam booking while other researchers often ignored these minor factors. Institution scale was also proved to influence student satisfaction. Wiers-Jenssen et al. (2002, p. 184) concluded that larger institutions have fewer satisfied students than smaller ones. However, these findings may suffer from a lack of reliability. Other factors such as organizational culture or nature of the institution, for instance, can also affect student satisfaction. Elliott and Shin (2002) concluded that factors claimed by students to be important does not necessarily mean that these factors influence overall satisfaction. These authors used the Student Satisfaction Inventory (SSI) and identified the following 11 out of 20 most important factors related to overall satisfaction which students claim to be important to them. Ashill et al. (2006) discovered a number of new and interesting determinants of student satisfaction such as motivation, learning style, instructor knowledge, feedback, student interaction and course curriculum. Alves and Raposo (2007) discovered that institutional image, student expectations, word of mouth, student loyalty, etc. were related to student satisfaction. Below is a table summarizing the factors of student satisfaction which have been discovered, tested and critically analyzed by researchers in their previous studies. This will help us to have a broader picture of student satisfaction.

Factors	Elliott &Shin	Ashill et al	Haque et al	Raposo	Wiers-Jenssen et al.
	2002	2006	2011	2007	2002
Instruction	V		V		
Advisor	V	V			
Knowledgeable Faculty	V	V			

Tuition Fee	V				
Campus	V		V		
Clarity Of Requirement	V				
Computer Labs	V		V		
Faculty's Fair Policy	V				
Access To Information	V				
Course Curriculum		V			
Student Interaction		V			
Feedback		V			
Motivation		V			
Learning Style		V			
Quality Of Teaching			V		
Research Facilities			V		
Library			V		
Canteen			V		
Space For Group Discussions			V		
ICT Facilities			V		
Institutional Image				V	
Student Expectations				V	
Word Of Mouth				V	
Institution Size					V

Table 2: Dimensions of student satisfaction

“There are nevertheless a growing number of standardized, commercially-produced measures of student satisfaction. These instruments are generally based on a sound theoretical basis and have been rigorously tested for their psychometric properties. Two of the most widely adopted instruments in higher education are the Student Opinion Survey (SOS) marketed by American College Testing (ACT), and the Student Satisfaction Inventory (SSI) developed by the Noel-Levitz consulting firm.

Letcher and Neves (2010, p. 6) acknowledged the value of these models of measuring student

satisfaction, (SOS and SSI). However, they noticed that most universities, depending on their mission, nature of the institution and student number, normally make use of tailored instruments to evaluate their student satisfaction (Letcher & Neves, 2010, p. 6). This is one of the most remarkable observations in the issue of student satisfaction which reflects the institutional research trend in universities.

### **2.6.2 Teacher Appraisal**

Teacher appraisal, also known as student evaluations of teaching (SET), is another instrument of student satisfaction feedback. However, unlike the institution-level student satisfaction which aims to examine institution level, teacher appraisal narrows its focus to individual teacher's performance level. Universally, when a semester ends, students almost all over the world normally have to fill out questionnaire forms to rate their instructors and their courses (Kember et al., 2002, p. 411). SET normally takes the form of a questionnaire which aims to collect students' views towards the teaching quality offered by one teacher. It consists of "a set of questions about the reliability, enthusiasm, knowledge, encouragement and communication skills of named lecturers" (Harvey, 2003, p. 17). Harvey (2003, p. 16) observed that teacher appraisal can either be used to assess teaching quality or a base for promotion and tenure consideration. According to previous studies, teacher appraisal embraces various positive benefits in relation to quality assurance process. It encounters, however, a great deal of criticism from experts in the field.

Marsh and Dunkin (1992) believed that student evaluations of teaching effectiveness can be useful for teachers, administrators, and prospective students in choosing courses and teachers, and for research into teaching (as cited in Richardson, 2005, p. 388). Marsh (1987, p. 369) concluded that student ratings are "multidimensional", "reliable and stable", more valid than other indicators, relatively unbiased.

On the other hand, teacher appraisal has been facing a great deal of criticism over the use of appraisal outcomes and the misconduct of teacher appraisal. The collection of students' evaluations does not result in any improvement in the quality of teaching if no serious continuation after the return of questionnaires is conducted (Kember et al., 2002). These authors, once again, confirmed the position of student feedback in relation to quality process. Harvey

(2003, p. 17) shares a similar observation toward teacher appraisal: “Students’ appraisal of teacher performance has a limited function, which, in practice, is ritualistic rather than improvement oriented”. Student feedback towards teaching is merely one step of the process and no practical result can be achieved if feedback data is not exploited to improve teaching quality. Moreover, whether the feedback data is used effectively or not is subject to the question of incentive (Kember et al., 2002, p. 420). Harvey (2003, p. 18) recommended that HE institutions “ensure that action is taken, and seen to be taken, to resolve and monitor the problems that such appraisals identify”. To sum up, students’ evaluation only works as intended if the result of it is carefully and systematically analyzed and used as a base to improve the weakness of the current teaching.

Rowley (2003, p. 146) summarized a range of question topics, often used in teacher appraisal or student evaluation of teachers (SET), based on the findings of Worthington(2002), Feldman (1984) and Marsh and Roche (1993)

<b>SET questionnaire<sup>a</sup></b>	<b>Feldman categories<sup>b</sup></b>	<b>SEQ factors<sup>c</sup></b>
<b>Aims and objectives</b>	Stimulation of interest	Instructor enthusiasm
<b>Content knowledge and pedagogical skills</b>	Enthusiasm	
<b>Personal characteristics</b>	Subject knowledge	Breadth of coverage
<b>Concern for students</b>	Intellectual expansiveness	
<b>Commitment to the use of formative assessment</b>	Preparation and organisation	Organisation/clarity
<b>Focus on deep learning outcomes</b>	Clarity and understandableness	
<b>Curriculum design</b>	Elocutionary skills	
<b>Commitment to improvement</b>	Sensitivity to class progress	
<b>Relevance of assessment</b>	Clarity of objectives	
<b>Overall rating</b>	Value of course materials	Assignments/readings
	Supplementary materials	
	Perceived outcome/impact	Learning/value
	Fairness, impartiality	Individual rapport
	Classroom management	
	Feedback to students	
	Class discussion	
	Intellectual challenge	Workload/difficulty
	Respect for students	
	Availability/helpfulness	
	Difficulty/workload	

**Source:** <sup>a</sup> Worthington (2002); <sup>b</sup> Feldman (1984); <sup>c</sup> Marsh and Roche (1993)

Table 3: Comparing question topics

To sum up, student's evaluation of teachers, a critical instrument of student feedback has been receiving a great deal of interest from practitioners and researchers. And like other evaluation instruments, its benefits and roles related to quality assurance process have been controversial. However, there is some agreement between scholars that SET is merely a part of the whole quality assurance process and only works as intended if it is followed up by necessary and timely actions. Regarding the dimensions used in SET, it can be seen that a wide range of perspectives and factors are exploited.

## **2.7 Student Feedback Questionnaires**

### **2.7.1 Timing**

As can be seen in the next part, response rate will be discussed separately although timing is a critical determinant in response rates in terms of quantity and reliability of the response. However, considering the complexity of this timing issue, the author chooses to separate it from the discussion of response rate in order to give the audience a clearer picture for the issue under scrutiny.

Feedback is generally collected at the end of the program or unit because it will cover overall experience of students throughout the course or program. Also, it can help lecturers and administrators to improve the next courses or programs. However, this way of timing cannot bring any benefits for the current students. Some scholars hold the view that the problem could be solved by issuing feedback at the early stage of the course or program. However, Powney and Hall (1998, p. 26) were afraid that "issuing questionnaires too early in a course can often mean that students have insufficient grounding in a particular subject to make appropriate comments". This leads us to the option of issuing a survey in the middle of a course. Narasimhan (2001, p. 182) believed that earlier feedback could be helpful to the current students by contributing immediate benefits. Adopting Narasimhan's suggestion means in order to benefit both current and prospective students, the current students will fill out questionnaires twice during their course. Unfortunately, Narasimhan's argument seems to have ignored the possible frustrations of students if they have to fill out a long list of questions in questionnaire forms more than once. Brennan and Williams (2004, p. 13) argued that carrying out formal feedback in the middle of the course may not be necessary provided that there are enough chances for informal feedback exchange between students and instructors. This argument reminds us of a very important factor

in student feedback, that is, student motivation and willingness in taking part in the questionnaires. This factor affects not only the timing but also the content and wording of the feedback, which may result in a phenomenon in students called “feedback fatigue”. However, Keane and Labhrainn (2005, p. 11) suggested that by thorough planning, HE institutions should make sure that students are cognizant of the purpose of the evaluation and what actions will be taken as the outcome of their feedback.

In conclusion, timing is a crucial part of the student feedback mechanism, or, if we look at a bigger picture, it is an important link in the chain of quality assurance. The paradox of timing in student feedback results from the need to achieve high response rate without decreasing the reliability of the response. In other words, the conflict of interest between the university administrators and students is the main root of this controversial issue. In terms of solution, universities can secure the response rate and reduce the “student fatigue” by equipping students with the awareness of the importance of their input.

### **2.7.2 Response Rates**

One of the important factors regarding the effectiveness of the collection of student feedback is the response rate. Besides the quality and reliability of response, student survey needs to achieve a sufficient number of student participants to be considered as valid evaluation. Nair et al. (2006) observed that to improve the value of student evaluations, response rate should be relatively high, which means that it can cover the views of a majority of students (as cited in Nair et al., 2008).

Nair et al. (2008, p. 226) discovered a number of determinants that can greatly influence the response rate of student feedback survey: “survey length, timing, mode of survey (paper-based or online), engagement of students, confidentiality, use of multiple contacts and offering incentives”. Among these factors, student engagement, timing, incentives are the ones that have been highly researched in previous study.



### **2.7.3 Incentive**

In a general context and based on theoretical evidence, incentives (usually a very small amount of money, or a little gift) can influence response rates by affecting how the participants perceive the positive and negative aspects of survey participation( Porter & Whitcomb, 2003, p. 392). However, when applied to the higher education context, the effectiveness of these incentives is controversial. Porter and Whitcomb (2003, p. 404) were concerned that financial incentives may accidentally establish the expectation effects that will “negatively affect future surveys”. In other words, while the effectiveness of using financial incentives is not clear, not using them may badly affect the outcome of the student survey. Porter and Whitcomb (2003, p. 404) also mentioned the possible approach of using promised charitable contributions, however, according to them, previous researchers found no clear evidence that this approach could bring any significant effects on response rate. Although Porter and Whitcom’s investigation into the impact of lottery incentives on student survey response rates did not generate any generalization regarding this issue, they did raise important concerns about many hypotheses related to the issues.

### **2.7.4 Trust**

Besides the incentives factors, Nair et al. (2008) also emphasized the need for institutions to create trust in students that their input will be highly appreciated and acted accordingly. Although students are the primary consumers of HE, they may not be willing to participate in the survey if they do not feel that some improvement, change or adjustment based on their comments will occur. In other words, HE should avoid adding frustration every time they ask students to fill out a survey, otherwise the so-called “over-surveying” or “survey fatigue” may adverse the reliability and validity of the outcome of the student feedback (Nair et al., 2008, p. 226). Another issue associated with the response rates lies within the nature of the modern students themselves. Students nowadays, are categorized as generation Y, have different lifestyles and mindsets. As a result, when asking for their opinions, educators normally need a different approach. Morton (2002, p. 4) discovered that generation Y tends to expect a lot in return for what they contribute.

In other words, unless students are shown they are directly benefiting from the whole quality assurance process, they are unlikely to contribute their ideas and views.

### **2.7.5 Student Engagement**

Nair et al. (2008) used two examples to illustrate the controversial role of greater student engagement in student feedback cycle. The first study was carried out in the Faculty of Education, Monash University, Australia. Nair et al. (2008, p. 227) described the research:

*“The study developed a successful communication strategy to increase student survey response rates. Bennett and co-workers employed a multiple communication strategy directed at increasing the engagement of both staff and students, which included: personalized emails to programme leaders and course coordinators; notices in the internal faculty electronic newsletter; notices on the online unit sites; electronic reminder messages sent to students; posters placed around the faculty; and sending reminder messages to staff. This strategy resulted in a high survey response rate in the Faculty of Education (83.2%) compared with the university average (43.8%). The strategy complemented the central university communication strategy, which included sending global emails and reminder messages to students and staff (Bennett et al., 2006).”*

Nair et al. (2008, p. 227) mentioned the result of another study in a different case but with similar tactics, however this study “did not result in significant increases in response rates.” Nair et al. (2008, p. 227) concluded that the former study suffered from a lack of validity. Unfortunately, the conclusion of the authors would be persuasive if they show more evidence of the possible invalidity of the former study.

To sum up, similar to timing, the above 4 factors play an pivotal role in process of collecting student’s views in particular and in quality assurance as a whole. Although there is still a great deal of debate around these issues, we can at least agree on the core issue in this matter. It all comes down to the way university administrators perceive the role of students in the quality

assurance process. They need to be considered not only as a consumer but also a contributor to the development of educational products.

#### **2.7.6 Paper versus Online Questionnaires**

The choice between paper or online questionnaires has also gained a substantial attention from researchers and university administrators as it is also germane to the effectiveness of student feedback mechanism.

In terms of cost and time, issuing and administrative fees can be saved more using online questionnaires (Sax et al., 2003; Schmidt, 1997) although the establishment cost in the transition from paper to online may be substantial as observed by Brennan and Williams (2004, p. 40). Also, Sax et al. (2003) observed that e-mail reminders are more cost-saving than postcards reminders. As also observed by Gaddis (1998), statistics processing tasks are normally faster with online questionnaires using the support of designated software (as cited in Handwerk et al., 2000, p. 2). Administrators can save a lot of time dealing a large number of responses, especially in a large-scale survey.

In terms of participation likelihood and access, conducting survey using internet can erase the geographical barriers of reaching participants who do not live near the current residency of the researchers (Swoboda et al., 1997). This advantage is even more critical now as many research works takes place outside the case areas. What is more, it is easier for participants to make time for filling the questionnaires as they can do it in their free time (Sax et al., 2003, p. 410). However, this may pose problems for those who do not have access to computer and internet (Brennan & Williams, 2004, p. 40), and those who lack of basic computer skills.

As far as the response rate is concerned, Handwerk et al. (2000, p. 11), surprisingly found that a paper survey received a higher response rate among college students than online surveys. Although the study pointed out a number of advantages of using online survey, it had to acknowledge that many students have difficulty in accessing computers. However, it has been 15 years since then, with speed of technology development and globalization, there is a need to retest this result again. Also, Handwerk et al. (2000) did not fully explain why the response rate of online survey was lower.

In terms of participant identity, online questionnaires are still suffering from the issue of anonymity. Brennan and Williams (2004, p. 40) concluded that students would be more eager to join the survey provided that their identity is secured. However, in the some online systems, as Brennan and Williams (2004, p. 40) observed, “the fact that students may be asked for their username and password can make the whole process look suspicious.” As a result, “difficulties in assuring anonymity and confidentiality, and technical problems present challenges” (Sax et al., 2003, p. 413). In other words, HE may need to be able to assure the anonymity of the whole process in order to trigger the confidence of students when they give their views.

As can be seen above, the debate between paper and electronic questionnaires is the debate about cost, time, and participation access and response rate. Again, depending on the nature of the institution, the existing infrastructure and the intended purposes, the administrators will have to choose between the two methods.

## **2. 8 Student Representation**

Besides the tool of questionnaire, which was discussed above, the use of student representatives has also been popular in collecting student feedback. Similar to feedback questionnaires, it is also a crucial part of the whole quality assurance process. Normally, in this channel, a student of each class or course will be elected to represent their voice. This person listens to and takes notes of their group’s feedback, summarizes the input and regularly reports the information to teachers, program coordinators or student unions. University staff normally use this input together with other sources to make necessary adjustments to existing policies. In this section, the author will discuss the role of student representatives as a means of collecting student feedback, as well as the advantages and disadvantages of this channel. Brennan and Williams (2004, p. 43) stressed 5 advantages of utilizing student representatives as follows:

*“First, they can provide a direct student input into decision-making. Second, they can provide a student view about the ‘future’ rather than the past – by commenting on proposals and plans for programme development. Third, communication is two-way and interactive and is not constrained by pre-set questions. Fourth, as far as the institution is concerned, it is cheap – few if any additional meetings, special papers to write or to read, data to collect and process. Fifth, the role provides opportunities for the personal*

*development of those students who fill it –it looks good on their CVs, it can build confidence and develop skills. Accordingly, we found that many students were keen to perform the role and would not be opposed to expanding it.”*

We can summarize the aforementioned findings by saying that this feedback channel is influential, interactive, cost-effective and rewarding. Mrozek et al. (1997, p. 160) also shared a similar observation by emphasizing the student representatives' capacity to impact on decisions related to academic affairs. However, it is argued that the level of influence of this channel also depends on how seriously the university staff take their views. Moving to the next advantage, Brennan and Williams (2004, p. 43) mentioned an important feature of the student representative channel - interaction. The interaction is meant here not only in the sense of communication between university staff and student representatives but also between students and student representatives. For the former line of communication, Little and Williams (2010, p. 124) discovered that representatives can “comment on programme delivery and other issues without this being seen as threatening (to staff) or negatively affecting their academic performance”. This finding reminds us of the importance of letting students speak their mind freely. If students are afraid of the possible consequences of giving negative feedback, they are likely to choose to tone down their voice. And this would seriously damage the reliability of their input. However, the importance of the attitude of the staff should be noted, too. If they do not see the student representatives' views as a threat, they are more likely to listen actively and openly, and the outcome of the communication will be more valuable. For the latter line of communication, students tend to feel more relaxed and honest when sharing their views with their representatives, and this helps to increase the reliability of their input. Besides cost-effectiveness, time can also be saved. Student representatives can respond to the students' feedback and concerns with their own experience and knowledge. This may save time for the university staff. Brennan and Williams (2004, p. 43) also mentioned benefits in terms of future career for students if they are holding the position of student representative. This can be considered as a more powerful incentive than the controversial usefulness of financial incentives in questionnaire feedback which was discussed in the previous part of the literature review. Little and Williams (2010, p. 124) also discovered that through this channel, student representatives can have a better sense of responsibility and better awareness of their learning experience. This is a significant

finding since, as we discussed above, students, GEN Y, need to feel that they are important in the whole quality assurance process.

In conclusion, unlike other instruments, the utilization of student representative tends to receive more favor. By this verbal communication, students can have more chances to witness their actual engagement in the whole quality assurance process. However, as can be inferred from the above findings, student representatives can work as intended if they are motivated by appropriate compensation of time and money, as well as benefits for their future career.

## **2.9 Actions and Decision-Making**

### **2.9.1 Student Feedback Cycle**

Turning now to the process of student feedback mechanisms, Harvey (2003, p.4) described the cycle as follows:

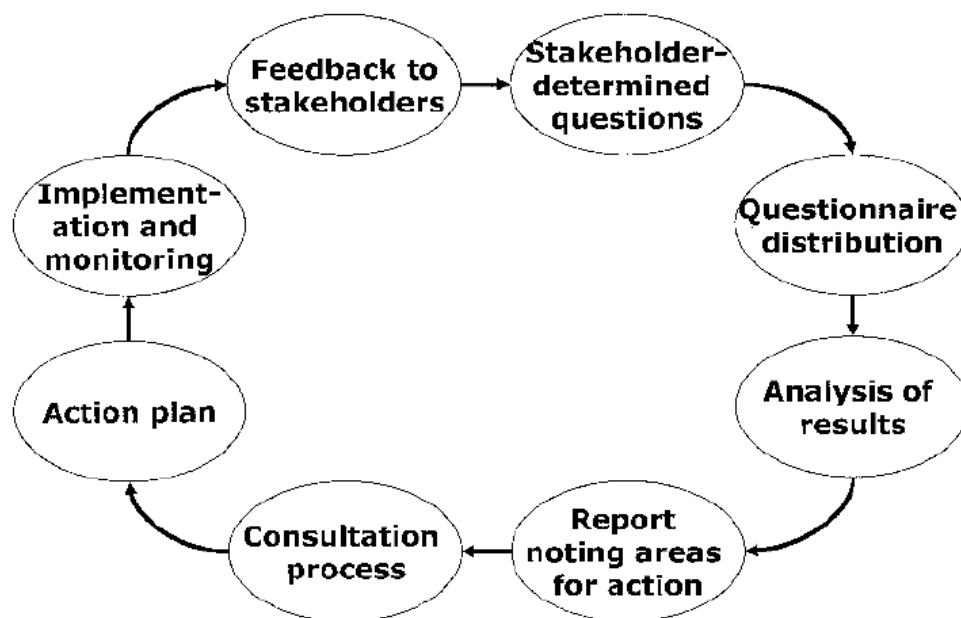


Figure 1: Harvey (2003) student feedback cycle

According to this cycle, firstly, the stakeholders participate in the process of creating questions which will be included in the questionnaires. The questionnaires, are then, distributed to students. After the distribution stage, these questionnaires are collected and analyzed. The outcome of the analysis is then reported to a related unit for consultation . During this stage, any action upon the feedback outcome will be considered before it is implemented. Finally, information about the feedback result as well as possible actions are disseminated to the stakeholders.

Brennan and Williams (2004, p. 7) introduced a cycle used in England and Northern England as follows:

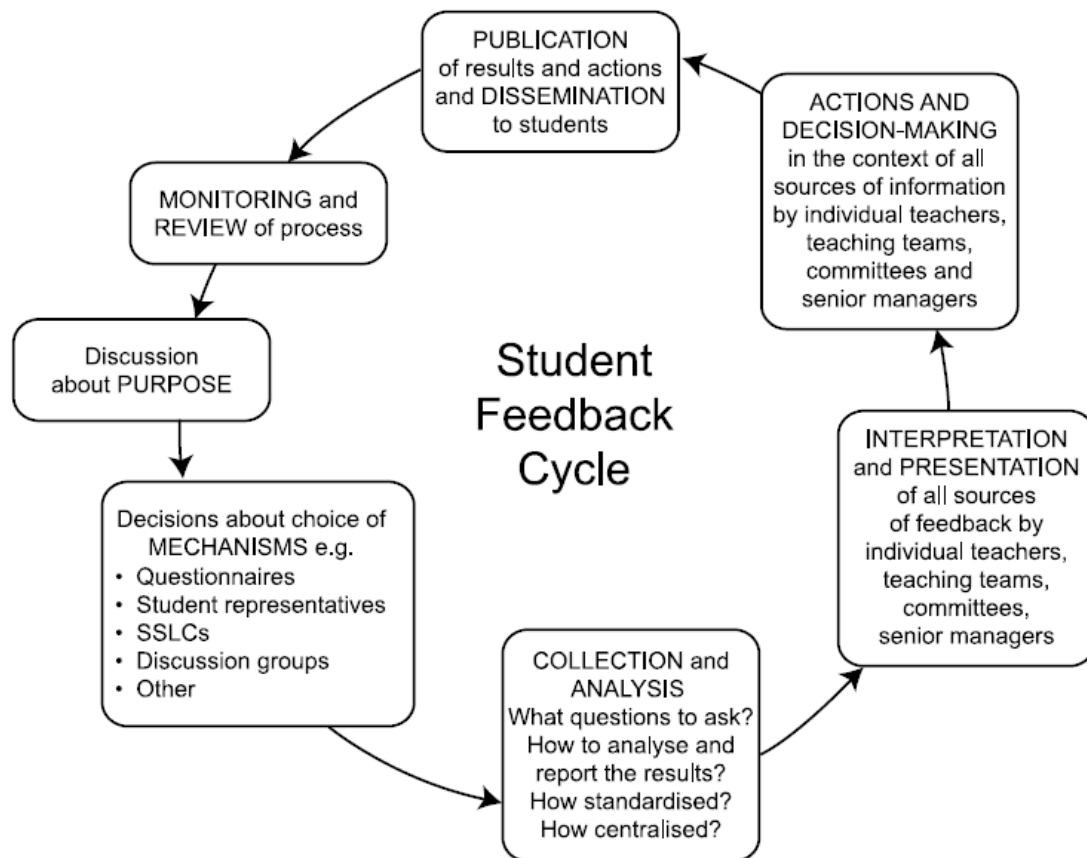


Figure 2: Student feedback cycle in England and Northern England

Figure 2 is a more detailed version of Figure 1. In terms of similarity, both cycles emphasize that the collection of student feedback is merely a part of the whole cycle, and it will not generate any

benefit without follow-up steps or action. In other words, student evaluation can be beneficial to the quality improvement so long as it is “integrated into a regular and continuous cycle of analysis, reporting, action and feedback” (Harvey, 2003, p. 4). While figure 1 gives a simplified demonstration of the whole process, figure 2 aims to equip readers with a better insight into the detailed actions and concerns.

The above two charts demonstrate an ideal student feedback cycle. In reality, the basic principles of this cycle may not be faithfully observed. As noted by Harvey (2003, p. 4), it is difficult to see how a university can close the feedback loop between the feedback data and the necessary actions.

### **2.9.2 Actions**

Before discussing this part, the readers may need to take another look at the author’s own definition of quality assurance in higher education. The author defines QA in higher education as the intention, awareness and activities for assuring effective services for students in their learning experiences in the institution. What can be inferred from this definition is that collecting students’ view is only a part of the whole quality assurance process. Without taking actions upon the student feedback, student feedback is merely a piece of information, or a quality indicator. Leckey and Neill (2001, p. 25) emphasized the need to close the feedback loop regarding the total quality management. It is feared that the willingness of student engagement in the student feedback cycle will decrease if students do not experience any changes as a result of their input (Leckey& Neill, 2001; Powney & Hall, 1998). According Watson (2003, p. 148), closing the loop is not only important to the overall quality management but also beneficial to the improvement of courses and programs of the institutions. Obviously, not all students’ complaints or suggestions can be responded to with follow-up actions or changes of policy. However, students should at least be informed that the universities or teachers have taken their views into consideration (Watson, 2003, p. 148). This would help to maintain the students’ motivation in taking part in further feedback sessions in the future. According to previous studies, not only the actions but also the whole student feedback cycle must be made available to students. Williams (2002) underscored the need to make the whole process transparent and to make senior management committed to it (as cited in Watson, 2003). From the above discussion, we can



conclude that researchers in this area insist on the importance of actions as an indispensable part of the whole student feedback cycle.

Though follow-up actions are considered to be crucial in the quality assurance process, unfortunately, it is not clear whether they are realized in reality. Even in countries like the UK, which is well-known for the quality of its higher education, linking student feedback, with staff reactions and actions is still a difficult task, as noticed by Powney and Hall (1998). One of the reasons for this comes from how university staff perceive student feedback. Powney and Hall (1998, p. 10) observed that some staff do not take student feedback seriously as they think the views are biased. Some teachers do not believe much in the reliability of students' views about their teaching because they think that students tend to give nice feedback in order not to disappoint their teachers. Even when student feedback is taken seriously, actions tend to focus on the narrow aspect of teaching, and very little attention is given to fundamental aspects of the future design of a program. Also, university staff may resort to the excuse that they need other sources of information before making a decision. This situation of acting upon the student feedback is noticed in Brennan and Williams (2004, p. 51).

It is undeniable that there is a need to close the feedback loop, both university staff and students, however, should be well aware that the student feedback result is just one of the channels on which changes of policy or actions are to be based. In other words, it is merely one of the sources of reference for changes in the chain of quality assurance. The university management normally has to go on to consult with teachers, officers or anyone related to the reported issues. Also, any changes should also go in line with the university's strategic objectives. Universities, even ones not funded by the government, have to go through many levels of bureaucracy before being able to make any decision. For the aforementioned reasons, Brennan and Williams (2004, p. 51) have to admit that expecting a direct connection between student feedback and decision-making is impractical. Harvey (2003, p. 4) also concluded that "it is not always clear that there is a means to close the loop between data collection and an effective action, let alone feedback to students on action taken". What can be inferred from this conclusion of Harvey's is that universities can hardly show clearly their actions upon the student feedback and that they lack the means to do so as well. Understanding the challenges faced by universities in closing the loop, Harvey (2003, p. 4) suggested a few prerequisites needed for a better quality assurance:

- *identifying and delegating responsibility for action;*
- *encouraging ownership of plans of action;*
- *accountability for action taken or not taken;*
- *feedback to generators of the data;*
- *committing appropriate resources.*

On the whole, although it is true that closing the feedback by executing appropriate actions is crucial, we still need to acknowledge some of the problems which universities have to cope with in carrying out actions or policy changes. Firstly, if we look at the bigger picture of the whole quality assurance, we can see that student feedback is only one of the sources for the university administrators and teachers to consider, and that they need to analyze other sources before making a decision. Secondly, the universities need to be pro-active in creating a protocol and procedures to be used in dealing with student feedback. From the student side, the implication for changes may not be followed up, but at least they deserve to know why or why not. Again, regarding the issue of follow-up actions, students need to know whether or not their voices have been heard or taken into consideration.

## **2.10 Publication and Dissemination**

### **2.10.1 The Importance of Feeding Back to Students**

Within a student feedback cycle, publication and dissemination of the outcome of the student feedback is as critical as issuing the feedback itself. The publication of student feedback normally contains the result of student feedback as well as the follow-up actions which have been or will be taken. As mentioned in the previous parts of the literature review, student feedback fatigue may occur if students do not see any resultant change or at least acknowledgement of their feedback. Brennan and Williams (2004, p. 53) believed that feedback to students and feedback from students are equally important.

Rowley (2003, p. 148) suggested that ideally student feedback outcome should “be shared with students, tutors and those responsible for the management of the provision, through a range of appropriate channels”. Although Rowley’s suggestion reflected the necessary transparency level needed in higher education, it may suffer a lack of careful consideration. The interpretation of this information, for instance, is hard to control once it has been made public.

Students normally do not get to have access to the student feedback outcome or they are not informed of how to access it. Some students even said that “they rarely hear anything further after making their comments, whether through questionnaires or by some other means.” (Brennan & Williams, 2004, p. 55). Powney and Hall (1998, p. 34) found that students did not get to be informed of the possible changes as a result of their feedback because they had probably moved to another class or program or because the student representatives had not done a good job in keeping the students informed. Consequently, student feedback outcome information is made known mainly to the senior management.

In other cases, information about student evaluation considered as not to be revealed. Harvey (2003, p.5) found that in Britain, student view is considered to be confidential. Williams (2002) suggested that the publication of student feedback might adversely affect the image of an institution, which can influence the choice-making process of prospective students and parents (as cited in Harvey, 2003, p. 5). Another reason for not publishing the student feedback is related to time-lag issues. Peter Knight, Vice-Chancellor of University of Central England, pointed out that usually the actions taken upon the feedback may have been taken before the possible date of publication of the feedback result (as cited in Harvey, 2003, p. 6).

In short, it is clear that there is a need to deliver the student feedback result as well as the actions taken upon it to students. However, in reality, the information regarding the student evaluation is not generally fed back to students, and is made known only to the people who are in charge of the quality assurance process.

### **2.10.2 Content of Publication**

Brennan and Williams (2004, p. 54) suggested that feedback outcomes, follow-up actions and the on-going process can be reported back to students via student representatives. There are also other means of dissemination. Minutes of meetings of staff and student committees and course assessments can be posted on notice boards or discussed in feedback sessions (Powney & Hall, 1998, p. 34). Leaflets and newsletters can also be used (Watson, 2003, p. 151). Nowadays, direct mail, social media and websites can also be exploited.

Another issue is timing – when the result of student evaluation should be published. This issue seems to be overlooked, as it is noticed by Brennan and Williams (2004, p. 54) as follows:

*"Many institutions recognise that they are weak in feeding back results and actions to students. This is often due to the timing of publication: students have moved on, especially at module level, and never find out the results of the feedback, let alone any actions or changes that were taken as a result of it. "*

As can be concluded from Brennan and Williams's observations, although HE institutions are well aware of the lateness of their publication, this situation cannot be solved easily. This is probably due to the fact that the process would take a great deal of time and would have to go through many levels. Nevertheless, Brennan and Williams (2004, p. 55) still urged HE institutions to try their best to feed the information back to students in order to gain their trust in the actual use of their input.

## **2.11 Emerging Issues**

It was revealed through the literature review relating to student feedback mechanisms that although the utilization of student feedback can be beneficial to the quality assurance process, there is still a great deal of criticism and debate regard its actual execution. Regarding elements of a student feedback questionnaire such as timing, response rate and incentives, there is still no clear agreement about the optimal execution of student feedback questionnaires. However, it is worth noting that most scholars insist on the importance of raising students' awareness and increasing their motivation in participating in the feedback process as well as increasing their trust towards university staff. As for the student feedback cycle, many researches observed that there is "a black hole" about what universities do with students' input. Additionally, there may be a need to close the feedback loop between students' opinions and the follow-up actions. Another controversial issue regarding this topic is the publication and dissemination of the student feedback. Universities normally encounter a conflict of interest in this matter. More specifically, while university staff recognize the need to disclose the student feedback outcome, they also fear that the disclosure may adversely affect the university's reputation.

## **Chapter 3 - Research Methodology**

### **3.1 Introduction**

Looking back on the research objectives of this thesis, it is worth noting that this study aims to provide theoretical and empirical evidence of student feedback mechanisms in HE. The literature review evidently shows that there is a research gap regarding the practice of student feedback mechanisms in developing countries. Additionally, previous studies hardly attempted to critically examine the practice of all student feedback instruments inside a university. Hence, there is a need to conduct the proposed empirical study in order to shed some light on the aforementioned research gap. By comparing theory with practice, the research will achieve a better insight into the actual execution of student feedback mechanism in universities as well as providing implications for further improvement.

Accordingly, this chapter – Research Methodology – will present the details of the research design adopted to the research issues mentioned above, together with the means of collecting data for analysis, framework for data analysis as well as its limitations.

### **3.2 Research Design**

This study is considered to be qualitative. Qualitative research is typically concerned with “exploring a particular phenomenon of interest in depth and in context, using the respondents’ own words (e.g. collected through lengthy, semi-structured interviews), and without making prior analytical assumptions” (Tight, 2012, p. 180). This observation corresponds with the objectives of this thesis, which aims to try to deeply understand the execution of student feedback mechanism in TCU and to critically examine any emerging issues related to the findings. Additionally, the appropriateness of the choice of the qualitative approach for this study is further supported in the sense that the author is more interested in understanding the phenomenon by in-depth analysis from the interview and documentary data rather than statistical findings. Following is the discussion of the research design.

As observed by Tight (2012,p. 182), case studies are widely adopted as a method for conducting research in higher education. This study is not an exception. According to Freebody (2003, p.81), a typical case study aims to “put in place an inquiry in which both reseachers and educators can reflect upon particular instances of educational prattice”. Comparing this goal with the aforementioned research objectives of this thesis, it is understandable why the author has chosen this approach. To put it another way, this approach, which can be considered as a productive interaction with the case study units, may serve as a way to explore some existing issues in depth, in this case, the execution of student feedback instruments in TCU. More specifically, regarding this choice of method, a descriptive case study approach will be utilized as a tool to capture the practice of student feedback mechanisms in TCU.

### **3.2.1 Case Selection**

There is currently a total of 61 public (i.e. government-funded) universities in Vietnam. Given the time constraint, the author chose a single case study in order to ensure the feasibility of completion of the thesis. Also, considering the fact the the operation of a Vietnamese public HE institution is highly regulated by the government, the 61 public universities may share a great deal of similarities in its governance, autonomy and quality assurance process. Therefore, any findings from this case study can reflect to a great extent, the practice of student feedback mechanisms inside Vietnamese public universities as a whole.

Another important feature of this case study is that the identity of the case university is anonymous. And this is so due to the two following reasons. Firstly, it is feared that the disclosure of the practice of student feedback mechanisms in the case university may adversely affect its reputation. Secondly, the anonymity of the case university is believed to help create a more comfortable and non-threatening atmosphere for the interviews. Hence, the interviewees are likely to be more open when asked challenging or sensitive questions.

### **3.2.2 Sampling Techniques**

Given the fact the there is no concrete internal policy and framework for conducting student feedback mechanisms in the case university, it is decided that a purposive sampling technique

will be utilized. As depicted by Macnealy (1999), in this sampling technique, each participant is essentially chosen to answer questions about a ‘matter or product’ (as cited in Latham, 2007, p.8). More specifically, each interviewee is chosen to fulfill a particular aspect of this research in terms of evidence contribution. Thus, this sampling technique may help to gain access to the data which is essential to the success of this investigation.

Accordingly, nine interviewees<sup>1</sup> representing various stakeholders in the operation of the case university were selected. As noticed by Macnealy, opinions and insight from the academic staff are most useful for analyzing the student evaluation of teaching. As for the quality assurance staff and other administrative officers, their input is greatly beneficial to the analysis of the whole student feedback cycle in TCU. Lastly, but equally important, the experience from interviewed students will further confirm the actual practice of the student feedback mechanisms in TCU. Obviously, all the participants will contribute to the overall description of the student feedback execution in the case university.

### **3.3 Data Collection**

This empirical data in this study mainly comes from two sources: interview and documentary data. With regard to the interview tool, in order to have an in-depth and enlightening conversation with the interviewees, the author will adopt the semi-structured interview method. The data gathered from the interviews serves as a source of information to describe and discuss the aforementioned research issues. In addition to this information channel, a review of related documents will be carried out. Although it is true that TCU suffers from a lack of documented guidelines of using student feedback, some basic documents such as student evaluation of teaching questionnaires and feedback reports are still present. The below discussion will further present the rationale for the use of the two mentioned tools.

As observed by Tight (2012, p. 185), interview method is “the heartland of social research”. Interviewing is useful for clarifying a complicated social phenomenon because it provides insight into not only what people know and think about something but also how they feel about it. To put it another way, this method can help to capture verbal and non-verbal messages from the

---

<sup>1</sup>The titles and positions are mentioned in appendix 1 – interviewees list

<sup>2</sup> AUN- QA, a quality assurance standard created by the Asian University Network, which aims to establish and

participants (Wyse, 2014). Given the level of complexity of the issue of student feedback mechanisms, this distinctive function of interview method is highly embraced.

While data resulting from interviews can be useful for examining issues which can take on multi-interpretation from different perspectives, documentary data can be vital for dealing with matters which need a certain level of accuracy. Therefore, the two main internal documents of TCU are reviewed: student evaluation of teaching survey and student feedback report.

### **3.4 Framework For Data Analysis**

This part gives the reader an overall picture of the whole data analysis process. Regarding the interview process, each interview will be conducted using a number of questions under pre-determined themes. These themes will reflect the aforementioned research objectives and the key issues emerging from the literature review: role of student feedback, instruments of student feedback, actions and decision-making, publication and dissemination, conclusion and implications. Additionally, these themes will aid the analysis phase following the collection of data. It should be noticed that under each theme, besides data gathered from the interviews, the author will also discuss the documentary data where applicable.



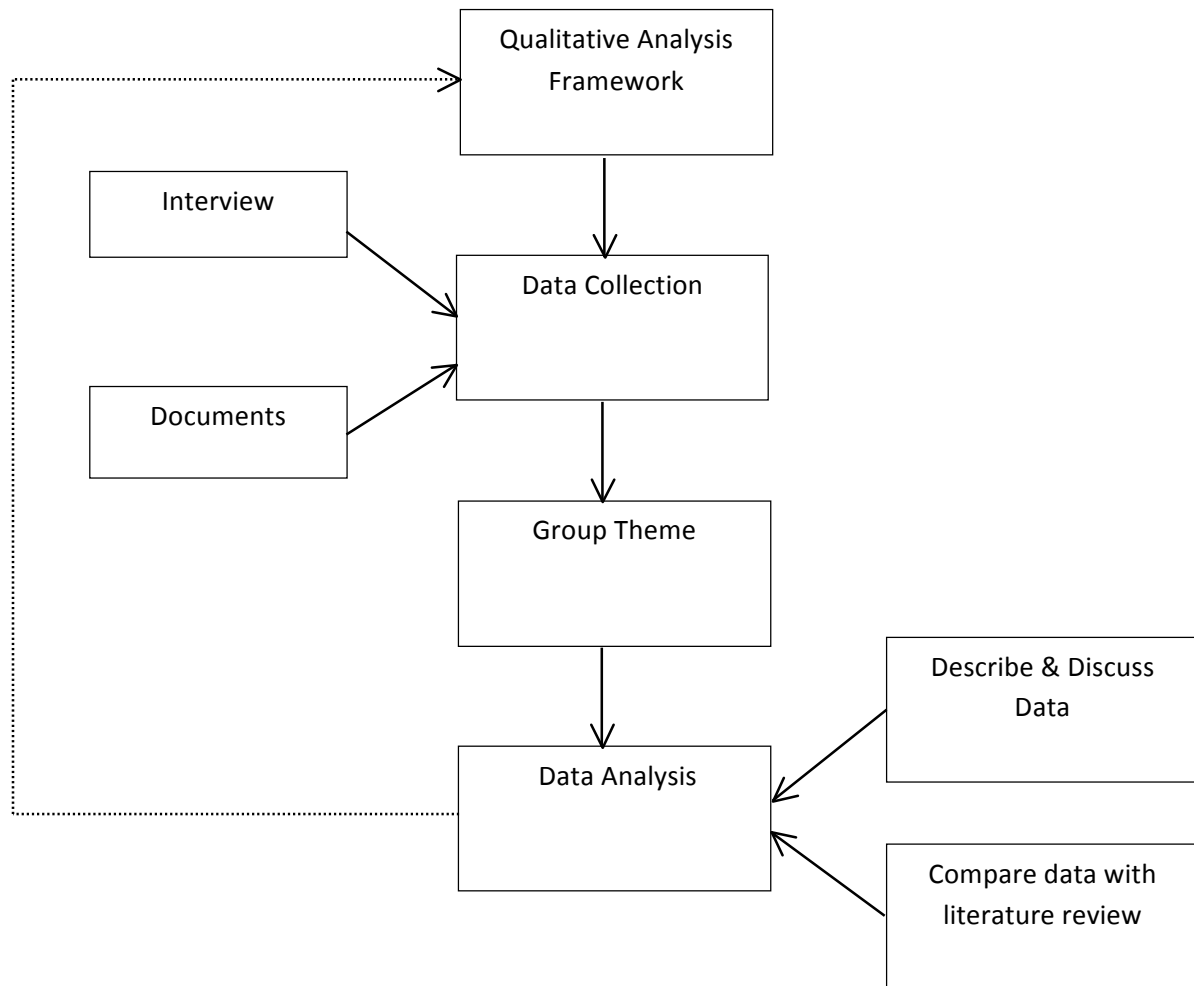


Figure 3: Qualitative Analysis Framework

Figure 3 is the author's effort to visualize the process of qualitative analysis conducted in this thesis. This diagram is adopted from the work of Biggam (2011,p. 289), which is rooted from Wolcott's guideline for the "iterative process of description, analysis and interpretation". Firstly, data are collected from the interview and document review. These data, then, are categorized under separate themes. Again, this step is relatively easy since the interview is already conducted in themes. Finally, in each theme, the data are depicted and discussed, and compared with the related literature reviews. However, even at this final phase, the author may need some additional information in any aspect of study. In this case, communication with the interviewee

by email will be utilized to collect further information. And obviously, the analysis of the new data follows the same framework as indicated in Figure 3.

### **3.5 Limitations**

The limitations of this study lie mainly in the way it is conducted. While acknowledging its appropriacy in fulfilling the research objectives, the selected methodology contains a number of drawbacks

Regarding the data collection method, in this case, interview method, Arksey and Knight (1999, p. 16) argued that “what people claim to think, feel or do does not necessarily align with their actions”. Hence, the information contributed by the interviewees may not faithfully convey what is actually happening in the case university. Additionally, although all the participants in this research are kindly requested to speak as freely and truly as possible, the responses are still subject to the question of objectivity. Despite the fact that the participants are mainly the author’s colleagues, which helps to create a comfortable atmosphere for the interviews, it may adversely affect the level of objectivity in the interviewee’s judgment. Also related to the issue of objectivity, the truthfulness of the responses may be questionable due to the fact that they are working or used to work for the case university. All in all, although the identity of the case university and that of the participant are not disclosed, the utilization of interview method in this study may to some extent affect the objectivity of the data, and ultimately, decrease the level of reliability and validity of the research findings

The use of qualitative case study approach in this research poses another limitation related to its transferability, or, in other words, its external validity. As stressed by Shenton (2004, p. 69), the “findings of a qualitative project are specific to a small number of particular environments and individuals, it is impossible to claim that the findings and conclusions are applicable to other situations and populations” . In this particular case, it is impossible to generalize the findings from the practice of student feedback mechanisms in TCU to another university.

## **Chapter 4 – Student Feedback in Vietnamese Higher Education and the Case University**

### **4.1 Introduction to Vietnam's Higher Education**

The purpose of this part is to give an overview of Vietnam's HE. Vietnam may not be a big country in terms of economy and geography, but in terms of history it is a relatively big country which has through many changes in its educational system. Hence, this introduction can be best treated under 3 stages: 1986-2005, 2005-2013 and 2013 – 2020.

#### **1986 – 2005**

As usual, the economic and social policy should be a useful starting point in analyzing a country's educational development. Back in 1986, the country embarked on a wide ranging effort called “Doi Moi”, which was meant to transform the national economy (Farrelly, 2011).

The system was extremely regulated by the State. The Ministry of Education and Training exercised its power over higher education and determined a wide range of matters from curriculum, student enrolment, academic assessment, awarding of degrees, staff appointment, budget decisions, to the building and maintenance of infrastructure and facilities (Dang, 2009). Although the World Bank started its first education project in Vietnam in as early as 1998, its impact was not seen during this stage. One of the most acceptable explanations for this is that while the World Bank recommended market-based economy, Vietnam government still adopted the socialist-oriented market approach in which state ownership remains dominant. Also, the academic self-governance, at this time, almost had little voice in deciding anything. Dang (2009) concluded that universities had little experience in supervising themselves or achieving their own goals. One more thing to look at is competition, which was out of the question at this time. HEIs were given a certain amount of budget regardless of its outcome. As can be seen from this stage, the government preferred input orientation to outcome orientation, and it totally controlled every process of a university. A top-down process with direct state intervention was the case.

## **2005-2013**

This period witnessed a slight switch from a more traditional type of governance to new public management as a result of some previous policies and greater integration into the outside world. There was a gradual shift from state control to state supervision. One indication of this movement is that in 2005 Vietnam government issued a program called the Higher Education Reform Agenda (HERA). According to this, more university autonomy was allowed. In addition, some autonomy was given to private universities, too. This period also witnessed the setting up of partnerships between Vietnamese universities and international partners, such as Hanoi University of Science and Technology with a French HE institution, Danang University with an HE institution in Japan, and the university of Can Tho province with an HE institution in the United States. According to Clark (2010), “the universities will operate under specific regulations approved by the prime minister, but will have much more autonomy than existing universities. They will be the first public universities in the country to hire foreign administrators, and in the initial stages 50-80 percent of the lecturers would be professors from the foreign institutional partners. The training of Vietnamese lecturers by both sides will allow the proportion of foreign lecturers to fall to 30 percent by the tenth year of operation.” As we can see from this example, the government was giving more power to the universities in terms of staff and management. This is, obviously, an evidence of increasing power of managerial self-governance.

What is more, during this period Vietnam observed some game-changing events when it comes to external guidance in higher education. In order to create new and better curriculums for universities, the ministry involved some international partners in tackling this task. New curriculums were developed in 23 important subject areas such as science and technology.

However, academic freedom, in most cases, barely existed. Lecturers were still constrained by socialist curricula and predetermined syllabi. It is true that the government was trying to involve many international partners in designing new curriculums but this happened only in a few areas of education and in several institutions for experimental purposes. A top-down process in the deciding the content of the training was still dominant.

One more significant change which can easily be observed during this stage is the dramatic increase of competition due to two major reasons. The first reason is, again, according to HERA, the government wanted to boost more privatization and market-oriented development. Private universities were given more freedom but only in managing staff and infrastructure. What is more, higher level of competition had been triggered, which probably resulted from the fact that Vietnam joined the World Trade Organization in 2007.

### **2013-2020**

In 2013, Vietnam's National Assembly passed law on higher education which aimed to allow higher institutional autonomy with higher accountability. This was believed to lead to major increase of managerial self-governance in the future. Also according to this new law, we can see some new stakeholders in external guidance such as the introduction of university council. Another important evidence of Vietnam's effort towards new public management is the removal of tuition fee cap.

However, the content of teaching, one of the most important factors which can hugely affect the level of success of education, is still mainly determined by the government. This may have resulted from the existing political situation of Vietnam. Even though the Vietnamese government has decided not to hide in the shadow of the former Soviet Union anymore and has been shaking hands with international organizations, Vietnam's leadership has often hesitated to give up its state control. Dang (2009) concluded that unlike many other former communist countries in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union, Vietnam's reform policy does not move toward the creation of a capitalist market economy. It move towards a socialist-oriented market economy, in which public ownership still holds a dominant position (Gou, 2006). For this reason, the Vietnamese government has been trying to remain the main controller of the content of education in the fear that unstable situations may happen.

All in all, since the government executed economic reforms in 1986, via the implementation of many new policies, Vietnam's HE has been witnessing a significant growth in terms of quantity, the system, however, is still facing a great deal of crisis and dilemma yet to be overcome.

## 4.2 Quality Assurance in Vietnam's HE Institution

Now that we have a better insight into Vietnam's HE thanks to the above overall governance equalizer, the author will discuss in depth the current quality assurance in Vietnam. It is not surprising that quality assurance of Vietnam's higher education is not well-developed (World Bank, 2008). As a result, Vietnamese HE institutions find normally it difficult to cooperate with international partners because of lack of accountability.

Vietnam's government first perceived the quality assurance in a relatively narrow sense of these words. Quality assurance was determined and assessed only by controlling and evaluating the student enrollment and content of teaching. As a result, there is a common belief held by Vietnamese students that it is hard to get accepted into a university but easy to graduate from it. Fortunately, as Vietnam's economy is growing at a rather fast speed and is facing fierce competition coming from Vietnam's joining in the World Trade Organization, there is a need to look at the quality assurance in a more comprehensive way. MOET has issued regulations that requires universities to have quality assurance centers, and to carry out self-evaluation every 5 years. It has also provided guidelines to assess the teaching quality. Another indication of the government's effort to increase quality assurance is reflected in its Higher Education Reforms Agenda (HERA) and in the establishment of the Department of Assessment and Accreditation. From the above events, we can see that the government has paid their attention not only to internal but also external quality assurance. However, Vietnam still has a long way to go in developing their quality assurance. As observed by World Bank (2008), Vietnam still suffers from a lack of a clear formation of degrees, where accreditation is not totally implemented. This is creating even more challenges for Vietnam's government when there is an increasing number of private institutions operating in Vietnam. As Pham (2010) highlighted in his country report about Vietnam's quality assurance in HE, there is a shortage of internal quality assurance for supervising student and auxiliary services and management in both public and private universities. Vietnam's HE also lacks "consistent and overarching review of teaching practices and quality (World Bank, 2008, p. 63). Additionally, Pham (2010) reported a low level of quality assurance awareness. This reminds us of Frazer's definition of the quality assurance process, which needs the attention and action from everyone, not just from university administrations and

the government. As Vietnam's HE is still in its early stage of development, it is relatively understandable that HE's stakeholders in Vietnam have not taken this matter seriously enough. What is more, low supply of expertise in quality assurance is one of the reasons for the underdevelopment of this field (Pham, 2010). Most of the staff working in this field ranging from the highest level in the government to the quality assurance executives inside each university normally do not go through formal training of quality assurance. Even those who have been trained abroad do not have an opportunity to raise their voice since they do not usually hold high positions in their institutions. The reason behind this is the promotion criteria in Vietnam's public workplace. As corruption dominates, promotion is often "based on non-scholastic criteria such as seniority, family and political background, and personal connections" (Vallely & Wilkinson, 2008, p. 4). Vallely and Wilkinson (2008) also discovered an important feature of Vietnam's organizational culture. High-level staff who were trained in the Soviet Union or Eastern Europe normally dislikes western educated colleagues. This cultural feature not only affects the quality assurance progress in particular but also the Vietnam's HE in general. This also reflects a current dilemma in Vietnam's HE, where the government wants to change, but at same time, do not want to lose their political power and benefits. All in all, what can be inferred from the above findings is that the quality assurance system in Vietnam is still at its developmental stage because of many complex reasons. There is a need to implement quality assurance which goes together with other changes in the system in terms of working culture, actions and awareness.

### **4.3 Student Feedback Mechanisms in Vietnam's HE Institution**

#### **4.3.1 Current Situations and Reasons behind**

As quality assurance is still underdeveloped in Vietnam's HE, it is understandable that student feedback, an important tool in quality assurance, is still at the very beginning of its development. While it is a widely held view that students plays a crucial role in the quality of the teaching and learning in an training institution, a small number of institutions in Vietnam elicit student feedback (World Bank, 2008). Obviously, since MOET issued a regulation which requires each university to install its student feedback system, the number of institutions exploiting student

input has increased. However, as discussed in the above sections, the implementation of this system still needs a long way to go.

The reason for this underdevelopment of student feedback first comes from the mindset of students and teachers. As mentioned before, Vietnamese teaching and learning styles were highly influenced by Confucianism. According to the Vietnamese culture, “a teacher/lecturer is considered to be a 'father' at school and therefore highly respected by students” (Mai, 2006, p. 67). Based on this relationship, students are afraid to raise their voice and concerns, and teachers are more dominant, and are often resistant to new ideas or innovation. At faculty or institutional level, the awareness is much the same. Since it is relatively hard to get accepted into a Vietnamese public university, Vietnamese students are reluctant to give their negative opinions about the university services in order to avoid unnecessary conflicts with the university administration. All in all, Vietnamese students are not aware of their rights and responsibilities in promoting quality assurance, or tend to avoid confrontation in order to protect their benefits in terms of grading and relationship.

The second reason comes from the nature of Vietnamese universities in terms of employment contracts and conditions. Most universities have loosened policies on teaching performance. Unless when teachers have serious misconducts, they can expect to be employed permanently by the university. Also, as mentioned before, non-academic achievement is more appreciated in the promotion process than teaching performance. Therefore, teachers do not have much motivation to perform their jobs properly. Hayden and Dao (2010, p. 222) noticed that only Vietnamese private universities, where employees do not possess permanent contracts, are more pro-active in taking student feedback. In public HE institutions, even management at higher level do not experience much pressure from the government in promoting learning outcomes in their institutions.

#### **4.3.2 Instruments Of Student Feedback**

As noticed in Mai (2006) there are four common instruments to collect students' views: mailbox, e-forum, Dean/Rector meeting with student's representatives, and questionnaire. Mailboxes are normally installed on campus and are collected regularly. Students can write down their complaints or concerns in a piece of paper and put it in one of these boxes. As for the e-forum,



students can feel free to submit their feedback about the university services and teaching quality. The advantage of the first two methods is that student can feel free to raise their voices. Unfortunately, they both suffer from a lack of guidelines for students. As a result, their input is often scattered and hard to collect and analyze. Also, students usually do not know about the follow-up process or what action taken as a result of their feedback, therefore they do not have much motivation to give their opinions.

#### **4.4 The Anonymous Case Study**

##### **Role**

TCU is the first university in Vietnam to educate technical teachers for the whole country. The university provides training for technical teachers at university and vocational school levels, tertiary education for technical engineers to supply for the Vietnamese labor market. Besides the training activities, TCU also conduct scientific research over a wide range of professional and technological areas. Additionally, the university cooperates with overseas educational institutions in various fields of teaching and research.

##### **Vision and Mission**

TCU aims to become a leading center for technical training and a research hub for applied science in technology and professional pedagogy in the context of globalization. It also aims to try to be an ideal example of sustainable development in the system of vocational education. In terms of mission, TCU is striving to provide highly qualified technical labors and high-quality scientific products in order to assist the development of Vietnam and in the world. It has also been actively contributing to the comprehensive renewals in education and training in Vietnam.

##### **Quality policy**

In order to equip students with necessary skills and knowledge for an increasingly competitive market in Vietnam and in the world, and to fulfill its goal of becoming one of the ten leading Vietnamese universities according the international standard of quality assurance, TCU is unceasingly improving its quality of teaching and scientific research.

## Objectives until 2015

- Increase the current number of lecturers to 940, with 85% of them possessing postgraduate qualification
- Improve its training and researching infrastructure to fulfill the need of around 20,000 students according to ISO 9001:2000
- Become a top ten university in Vietnam in compliance with quality assurance standard, comparable with leading universities in the Asian region
- Become a multi-discipline university which can fulfill a variety of learning demands of students
- Provide a highly qualified workforce in order to contribute to the development of Vietnam's society
- Provide regionally and internationally recognized degrees
- Bring about positive influence to life in Ho Chi Minh City as well as in Southern Vietnam

## Student feedback mechanisms in TCU

No	Instruments used at TCU	Level	Users
1	Formal student evaluation of teaching questionnaires	Individual teacher	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>✓ Teachers</li><li>✓ Faculty's board of management</li><li>✓ Quality assurance office</li><li>✓ University's board of management</li><li>✓ Accounting office (in the future, when KPIs are installed)</li></ul>

2	Overall student satisfaction	Institution	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Quality assurance office</li> <li>✓ University's board of management</li> <li>✓ Faculty's board of management</li> <li>✓ Current students</li> </ul>
3	University Alumni satisfaction	Institution	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Quality assurance Office</li> <li>✓ university's Board of Management</li> <li>✓ Faculty's board of management</li> <li>✓ Future students</li> </ul>
4	Meeting of university's board of mangement and all university's current students	Every level	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ University's board of management</li> <li>✓ Faculty's board of management</li> <li>✓ Representatives of each faculty and office</li> </ul>
5	Meeting of faculty staff and its students	Faculty level	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ University's board of management</li> <li>✓ Faculty's board of management</li> </ul>

Table 4: Levels and users of student feedback

## Chapter 5 – Result and Discussion

This chapter presents the results of the case study described in Chapter 3 - Research Methodology. The research concentrates on exploring the relevant aspects of the practice of student feedback mechanisms of the case university: roles, instruments of student feedback, actions and decision-making, publication and dissemination. Additionally, this chapter has a conclusion as well as implications resulting from the findings. The case study is approached in a highly structured way. In each theme, the author not only describes the findings but also reflects on them with relevant literature.

### 5. 1 Purpose of Student Feedback

While the role of student feedback in HE institution has been controversial, it should be at least acknowledged that student feedback can be a source of information for HE stakeholders to fulfill some certain purposes. As for internal stakeholders, it can be used as a guide for quality improvement, and for the external stakeholders such as governments and future students, it can be used for assessing accountability and regulations compliance (Harvey,2003, p. 3). Regarding the guidance for internal quality enhancement in TCU, all the interviews conducted with university staff affirmed this role. R1, for instance, who is currently working as a quality assurance specialist for TCU, remarked:

*In TCU, we use student feedback as a means to evaluate the quality of the university's services. For example, we use it to find out which aspects are good and which need further improvement or consideration (Personal communication, March 20, 2015).*

Regarding the external uses, based on the interviews and documentary data, it is clear that the implementation of student feedback mechanisms in TCU is also for fulfilling the government's regulations. In implementing Vietnam Education Law, MOET issued regulations in 2005 which require every university to install student feedback mechanisms in their internal quality assurance. Moreover, besides fulfilling the government's regulations, through student feedback mechanisms, TCU also aims to increase its accountability in order to attract more potential students as well as to increase international cooperation with the foreign educational partners.

Most recently, TCU plans to implement AUN- QA<sup>2</sup> to help enhance their existing student feedback mechanisms. This action is a clear indication that the university's board of management has recognized the importance of student feedback in increasing its opportunities for international cooperation. This action should also be considered as a good example of the university's effort in improving quality assurance amongst the common belief that "Vietnam's institution does not evaluate itself according to the international standards" (as cited in Vallely & Wilkinson, 2008, p. 4).

In previous research, student feedback was also seen as being used as a basis for appointment, tenure or promotion (Richardson, 2005, p. 401). Unfortunately, this role has not been tapped in TCU. As revealed by all the lecturers asked, they barely pinpointed the link between the student feedback outcomes with their employment contract. In this regard, R7, who is working as a lecturer for the faculty of foreign languages, commented as follows:

*I don't think it relates to the renewal of teachers' employment contract. I think it's mainly for reference purposes; the university just wants to know our current teaching performance. I can hardly see any promotion or punishment as resulting from the rating of our teaching performance. (Personal communication, March 03, 2015.)*

R4<sup>3</sup>, gave further comments on the matter:

*It's true that the outcomes of student feedback do not have much to do with changes, if there are any in the teachers' contract. However, the punishment may be more visible in the case of visiting lecturers. There are few cases when visiting lecturers could not renew their contract due to the low ratings of their teaching performance for several semesters in a row.. As lecturers, we are not really motivated to improve our performance upon the student feedback (Personal communication, March 03, 2015.)*

Combining the observations made by R4 and R7 and the rare cases visiting lecturers whose work contracts were not renewed due to low student ratings, the author envisages that student feedback outcomes at TCU, in general, does not influence policies concerning employment, promotion

---

<sup>2</sup> AUN- QA, a quality assurance standard created by the Asian University Network, which aims to establish and maintain a high education standard in each and every country in the ASEAN regions.

<sup>3</sup> R4 was a former lecturer and deputy dean of faculty of foreign languages at TCU. Her responsibility is to supervise students and teachers' performance and activities.

and punishment . It is worth noting that the TCU's board of management is starting to pay attention to this situation and is planning to use student feedback as one of the bases for calculating staff's salary by using KPI<sup>4</sup>. Regarding the future implementation KPIs, R1, noted:

*The university now is starting to trigger the staff's awareness of student feedback concerning their performance. So we are planning to use KPIs in calculating staff's salary. Student feedback ratings will be one of bases for the KPIs formulation. (Personal communication, March 20,2015.)*

Besides the aforementioned role of student feedback, the data gathered in the study also demonstrates that the university has recognized student feedback as a tool to create an image of a university which cares about what its students think. Following is a note made by R2<sup>5</sup> on this issue:

*Collecting student's view can be beneficial to the image of TCU. We want students and parents to know that we care about them.(Personal communication, March 19, 2015.)*

This may be an indication that Vietnamese public HEs are starting to perceive students as customers, which means they will need to listen to students more. However, it should be noticed that only 2 out of 9 participants recognizes this role. Interviewed teachers and students are not aware that collecting student feedback is important to the image of the university, or that students deserve to be heard as customers. This contrast is, however, considered to be unsurprising because of the powerful influence of Confucianism in Vietnam (Harman & Nguyen, 2010, p. 75). Despite many changes and reforms in the Vietnamese higher education , the deep-rooted tradition is that students are to receive feedback from teachers and schools, rather than the other way round.

Looking from students' perspectives, student feedback is not only beneficial to academic and administration staff but also to students. As suggested by Rowley (2003, p. 144), by giving their own views, students can have chances to reflect on their learning process and to increase the

---

<sup>4</sup> KPIs: "A performance indicator or key performance indicator (KPI) is a type of performance measurement. KPIs evaluate the success of an organization or of a particular activity in which it engages" **Invalid source specified**.. In this case, TCU is planning to uses KPIs for calculating staff's salary.

<sup>5</sup>R2 has worked for TCU for more than 22 years. She used to be head of student affairs office, and currently works as head of PR and enterprise relations office.

learning competencies. Nevertheless, the findings from interviewing two TCU students lends support to the claim that TCU students merely consider their opinion input as fulfilling a requirement from the university and that they fail to see any benefits from doing so. Unsurprisingly, academic and administration staff do not realize this role, either. When being informed about a several role of student feedback, R9, confessed :

*To me, the student feedback stuff is just one of the pieces of work the university management is doing for form's sake.. I guess it may help to increase the training quality a little bit. But it has little to do with us. My classmates and I do not see much of the benefit of student feedback which you are telling me about. (Personal communication, March 19, 2015.)*

This statement not only illustrates that TCU students are not normally cognizant of the benefits of their input towards their learning but also a contradiction between what the TCU staff and students think about the reality of the role of student feedback in TCU. While TCU university staff acknowledged a number of functions of student feedback in the interviews, their students did not realize any benefits. The reasons behind this contradiction will be discussed in the other themes.

### **Summary of student feedback role in TCU**

To summarize, in terms of role of student feedback, comparing the data from the interviews and the literature review, we can conclude that TCU's staff recognize the importance of student feedback in internal quality improvement, accountability, and image of the university. However, there has not been a link between student feedback outcomes and employment contract, promotion and punishment for the university staff. Hence, university staff, especially the academic employees do not have sufficient motivation in enhancing their teaching quality. It is hoped that by implementing KPIs in the near future, TCU will to some extent be able to increase the motivation among their staff. As for students' perception, they are not aware of the benefits which student feedback can bring to their learning, and they do not believe that their own feedback will lead to anything in the case university.

## 5.2 Levels and Users of Student Feedback

As can be seen in table 4, the student feedback mechanisms of TCU currently cover a wide range of levels from the narrowest such as assessing teachers' performance to the most comprehensive such as institution. However, if we compare this table with the list of types of student feedback by Harvey (2003, p.6), TCU lacks student feedback at program or module level. Fortunately, these levels of student feedback are to some extent discussed via the meeting instrument.

In terms of users, except for the informal exchange between students and teachers, the outcome of other student feedback mechanisms is subject to how it is used by TCU's board of management. For other stakeholders, the information is distributed depends on how it relates to their duty. Frazer (1997, p.10) emphasized that everyone in an organization should be able to use the systems "*which are in place for maintaining and enhancing quality*". Assuming Frazer's suggestion is appropriate in the higher education context, it can be seen that teachers and students as users seem to be missing in the user list of instruments numbered (3), (4) and (5). This situation will be explained when discussing each instrument and the section "Publication and Dissemination".

## 5.3 Instruments Of Student Feedback At TCU

The next section of the qualitative case study is concerned with instruments of student feedback. As noted above, there are five instruments of student feedback currently used in TCU. However, this thesis will discuss only instruments numbered (1) and (5). This is because, according to the interview data, these two tools have been used in TCU for several years and have served as an important source of student input inside TCU. The other instruments have just been used for one year, therefore, the author and the interviewees cannot have a thorough understanding of how these new instruments are actually used. Finally, in order to ensure the necessary analytical depth of this thesis, it may be a wise thing to do to describe and critically examine the existing practice of the two most popular instruments of student feedback in TCU. Again, the findings used in the discussion comes from the interview and documentary data.



### **5.3.1 Student's Evaluations Of Teaching**

As listed in table 4, there are currently 2 ways of collecting students' view about their teachers' performance. Due to time constraints, this thesis only discusses the formal means of SET. At TCU, the execution of formal SETs was originally the responsibility of the academic affairs office. It is worth noting that TCU first carried out SET in order to follow the MOET's regulations in assessing teaching quality. Since the implementation of SET, the university has made tremendous efforts in utilizing this tool. Two years ago, this task was taken over by the quality assurance office. Instead of issuing paper questionnaires to each class, TCU has installed an online feedback tool inside their internal online system, which is now used frequently by their students. Students normally access this online system in order to enroll courses and check their grades. Currently, this system is being programmed to require students to complete a SET about the teachers they have studied in the current semester if they want to enroll for new courses or check their grades. As a result, students normally fill in SETs at the end of course, and it is a compulsory step for every student.

#### **Role of SET**

Following is a list of functions of SET, which is built from the research findings of Marsh and Dunkin (1992), Richardson (2003) and Chen and Hoshower (2003), and Keane and Labhrainn (2005, p. 5):

- (1) a formative and diagnostic feedback mechanism (for use, for example, in efforts to improve teaching and courses);
- (2) as a summative feedback mechanism (for use, for example, in personnel and administrative decision-making);
- (3) as a source of information for prospective students when selecting course units and lecturers;
- (4) as a source of data for research on teaching.

What can be inferred from this list is SET can be a valuable source of information for students, teachers, researchers and administrative staff. We will compare these four functions with the current situation of the utilization of SET in TCU.

It is not surprising that teachers and administrative staff concurred on the first role of SET as a compelling tool to increase teaching performance. The following remark was made by R4:

*SET helped me to have an overall view of my teaching, what is good and what should be improved. After receiving SET, I try to adjust my teaching style accordingly. I paid a lot of attention to SET, especially with the subjects that I was teaching for the first time. (Personal communication, March 03, 2015.)*

When asked about the second role, all teachers and administrative staff also reached a common agreement. However, this time, they almost denied the second role of SET as a tool for personnel and administrative decision. In this matter, R6<sup>6</sup>, for instance, had this to say:

*SET has been mainly for reference purposes since it was first implemented five years ago. It has not been a real base for promotion or punishment. If a teacher receives low ratings, he may just be warned by the dean of his faculty. I hardly see any serious punishment or pressure to change. (Personal communication, March 01, 2015).*

Complementing R6's opinions, R4, a former deputy dean of the faculty where R6 is currently teaching, made this remark:

*The faculty's board of management does not use the SET outcome much in matters relating to promotion or punishment. If a teacher who receives very low ratings for several semesters in a row, the section head or myself may visit or observe his or her class and give advice for improvement. (Personal communication, March 03, 2015.)*

R1, a current quality assurance specialist, provided further evidence to confirm that even when QA staff notice the continuous low level of rating of a certain teacher, all they do is to give that teacher as well as the faculty's management some warning

Regarding the role of serving as a source of information for prospective students and researchers as addressed in (3) and (4), none of the interviewees affirmed this role or are aware of its existence. R9, for instance, disclosed:

---

<sup>6</sup>R6 has worked as a lecturer for TCU for more than 5 years. She used to be a student tutor at TCU whose job is to assist student learning and to respond to the students' feedback and questions. However, the practice of using of student tutors in TCU was discontinued in 2014.

*When choosing teachers for the next semester, I usually consult with my friends or my former teachers. I don't have access to the SET outcomes for reference purposes. (Personal communication, March 19, 2015.)*

From the frustration shown by R9 when asked about the role of SET, it can be additionally inferred that university staff and students have doubts towards the actual benefits of SET outcomes in TCU.

By and large, it can be concluded that in TCU, SET only serves a tool for improving teaching performance and as an indication that TCU is complying with the government's regulation in quality assurance.

### **Timing**

It must be admitted that the current timing of issuing SETs in TCU is appropriate in the sense that only at the end of each course can students have an overall picture of the performance of their teachers and as the outcome of their learning. All interviewed teachers, students and administrative staff agreed with this timing and the reason behind this choice. In this matter, R4, had this to say:

*At the end is OK because only at the end can students know enough about the teaching performance of their teacher. (Personal communication, March 03, 2015.)*

Nevertheless, previous studies challenged the appropriateness of this timing. Keane and Labhrainn (2005, p. 11) suggested there should be SETs in the middle of the course in the fear that leaving the SETs to the end of course will only benefit the future students, not the current ones. However, the authors themselves also admitted that having to fill SETs twice will generate tiredness in students. The responses evidently show that TCU staff and students generally agree with Keane and Labhrainn's arguments but also said that issuing another SET in the middle may not be necessary. This is an explanation offered by R3:

*Issuing SETs will be redundant. Firstly, throughout the course, students, from time to time, already give feedback to their teachers if necessary. Secondly, in the meeting of students and faculty staff, which happens at the middle of the semester, students already*

*have a chance to give their oral feedback about the teaching performance. (Personal communication, March 18, 2015.)*

This explanation can be put forward as a solution to the paradox of timing which has been much debated in the literature. Instead of carrying out the SET twice, university and teachers can get to know more about their students' expectations or opinions about the current teaching performance by organizing student-staff meetings in the middle of a course or a program. By exchanging ideas with students, the university can ensure benefit for the current students, and at the same time, is able to avoid the "feedback fatigue" phenomenon.

### **Response rate**

According to Nair et al. (2006), response rate should be relatively high in order to secure the value of student feedback (as cited in Nair et al., 2008, p. 226). In the case of TCU, the response rate in SET is relatively high, and this is not surprising. As depicted above, SET completion is a mandatory step if students want to enroll for the next courses or to check their grades. Therefore, as observed by R1, the response rate is almost 100%. However, the reliability of the SET outcome in TCU is questionable. The general feeling among the interviewees towards the reliability of SET was negative since they noticed that students, in many cases, merely completed the SET as part of the compulsory procedures when enrolling for the new courses, and they were not serious when doing it. R8, a final year student at TCU, for instance, made this remark:

*Most of the time, we just fill up the form as fast as we can. None of my classmates and myself put much thought in it. (Personal communication, March 20, 2015).*

The interviewees' doubt towards the reliability of SET is not surprising since this matter has been discussed in previous studies. Actually, TCU is not the only institution that makes the completion of the SET mandatory. This practice has been a trend in some universities in the world, Irish universities, for example. Regarding this matter, Moore and Kuol (2005, p. 147) made this remark:

*"Too often SET (student evaluations of teaching) systems have been compulsory, publicly displayed, uncontextualised, unsupported, simplistic and interpreted in isolated ways, features which render SET's punitive bureaucratic tools rather than supporting*

*mechanisms through which enhanced learning environments can be created and sustained.” (as cited in Keane & Labhrainn, 2005, p.5)*

Besides expressing her doubts towards the reliability of SET, one interviewee, R4, made the following observation, which can be used to get to the core of the problem regarding the reliability of SET in TCU:

*I think the use of SET itself in TCU is absolutely necessary. However, its execution is not good. By making the completion of it compulsory, the university achieves a high response rate. Unfortunately, there has been little consideration of the truthfulness of students' input. Students are just concerned about getting things done, and the completion of SET has nothing to do with their awareness of quality improvement. (Personal communication, March 03, 2015).*

To sum up, although the response rate in TCU is sufficiently high, its reliability is still questionable, and this is so due to the actual execution of SET. It is advised that TCU should find a solution in order to secure both the high response rate and the reliability of the students' input.

### **Paper versus online questionnaires**

Before starting to use online questionnaires in 2012, TCU had been issuing SET to students in paper form for 6 years. The data evidently shows that all TCU staff informants preferred the use of online questionnaires over paper ones. Regarding the cost effectiveness of using paper questionnaires, R3, made this comment:

*When TCU used the paper survey, we usually wasted a lot of paper. Every time we issued a paper survey to students in one class, we had to assume that every student of the class was present. Obviously, because not every student was present, so there was a lot of paper which had not been used. (Personal communication, March 18, 2015.)*

Commenting further on the issue, R1, whose job is to collect and analyze SET surveys, said:

*Using the online system, TCU is able to save a great deal of duplication cost. Also, it makes my work far less intense that it used to be. The computer software almost takes care of everything from collecting to putting data into pre-programmed categories. My*

*job is merely to extract data that we need and report it. (Personal communication, March 20, 2015)*

The general feeling among the interviewees was that online questionnaires are certainly more useful than paper questionnaires. These results are in accord with previous studies which indicated that in terms of cost and time, fees can be saved more by using online questionnaires (Sax et al., 2003; Schmidt, 1997).

### **Student Motivation**

Aside from response rate, the intended purposes of SET in particular, or the whole student feedback mechanisms in general, are only achieved if students have a high motivation in giving their views. More specifically, many previous studies believe that student motivation in this matter depends on the level of trust in the institution's follow-up uses of their input and awareness of the importance of their input, and also the nature of their lifestyles and mindsets.

Nair et al. (2008) concluded that students would have lower motivation in giving their ratings if they did not feel that some improvement, change or adjustment based on their comments could take place. All student interviewees tallied with the above conclusion. R9, a former student at TCU, said the following thing in a tiring manner:

*I felt very frustrated every time my teachers or the university staff asked me to fill in a SET form. What is the point of doing it if you cannot see anything in return? (Personal communication, March 19, 2015.)*

Students' motivation in participating in the student feedback mechanisms also lies within their general mindsets and lifestyles. Morton (2002, p. 4) discovered that the current generation of students, generation Y, tends to expect a lot in return for what they contribute. To put it another way, unless students are shown they are directly benefiting from the whole quality assurance process, they are unlikely to contribute their ideas and views. Back to the case of TCU, after several times filling in the SET form since their early years in TCU, they have not been able to link the quality improvement with their input. And this is why they cannot maintain their motivation.

Before going on to discuss the issue of students' awareness, let us go back to the author's own definition of quality assurance in higher education

Quality assurance in higher education is the responsibility of students, teachers, support staff and senior managers to establish the intention, awareness and activities for assuring effective services for students in their learning experiences in the institution.

As can be inferred from this definition, students' awareness of the importance of their participation in QA effectiveness is indispensable. TCU has not organized any activities, campaigns or information sessions which aim to enhance the students' awareness of this issue. Therefore, it is predictable that TCU's students fail to see the value of their input in contributing to the effectiveness of the QA. R8, a current student, had this remark:

*My friends and I have no ideas about the importance of our input. As far as we know, we are required to fill in the SET form. No one told us anything about what it is for. (Personal communication, March 20, 2015.)*

Taken together, these results suggest that that TCU students' motivation in participating in SET is relatively low. And this is because, firstly, students do not believe that there will be any changes as a result of their input. Secondly, they have not been briefed about the importance of their engagement in the whole quality assurance process.

### **Content of SET**

When analyzing the content of the SET questionnaires and the interview data, the author noticed a number of key characteristics relating to the design of the SET questionnaire in TCU:

- (1) Although the themes used in the TCU set are pre-determined by the government, TCU is allowed to create questions which are specific to the situation of university (Personal communication, March 20, 2015)
- (2) There is only one set of questions for the SET questionnaire used for evaluation of lecturers regardless of the nature of the subject they are teaching (Personal communication, March 20, 2015)
- (3) There are 3 areas of evaluation which are found in the TCU's SET: (1) teaching method, (2) content of teaching and assesement, (3) class management . The sub-questions are designed on Likert Scale from "Totally Agree" to "Totally Disagree". Additionally, at the

end of the questionnaires, students are asked to make other comments regarding their overall satisfaction and to make suggestions.

Regarding the characteristics in (1), it can be said that although it has to do things in compliance with the government guidelines and regulations, TCU is well aware that the questionnaires should be designed in a manner that they can fit the specific situation of the teaching. This matter was discussed in the previous studies regarding the designing of the questionnaire. Rowley (2003) suggested that the institution should consider the nature of subject being taught, teaching style as well as the intended purposes when designing the questionnaires. For example, there should be separate forms of questionnaire for online learning, distance learning and work-based learning. Unfortunately, although TCU recognizes the need to design their own questionnaires based on the specific situation of their university<sup>7</sup>, it fails to take into account the differences in the nature of each faculty. In this matter, R5, a lecturer, made this comment:

*Having different SETs for different subjects is a waste of time but at least there should be a separate SET form for each faculty. (Personal communication, Feb 28, 2015.)*

Given the fact that TCU is multidisciplinary, the suggestion made by R5 is relatively reasonable. However, it is worth noting that R5 is the only interviewee who paid attention to the design of SETs.

Regarding the dimensions of SET, as presented in Table 1, Rowley (2003) summarized a range of questions and topics which are often used in teacher appraisal or student evaluations of teaching, and are based on the findings of Worthington (2002), Feldman (1984) and Marsh and Roche (1993). Compared with this table, the learning outcome dimension is absent in the content of TCU's SET. In other words, what students know or can do as a result of training activities has not been taken into consideration.

### **Summary of findings – Student evaluation of teaching instrument**

Apart from the issue of follow-up actions which is discussed separately in other parts, other critical issues associated with SET such as roles, timing, response rate, student motivation and

---

<sup>7</sup> TCU mainly provides tertiary training in the field of science and technology.



content have been put under careful scrutiny by the author. It should be noticed that because the practice of SET is, more or less, still at the early phase of its implementation, there are a number of issues which need improvement. Three most emerging findings are the underutilization of SET's functions, low motivation of university student and staff, and lack of reliability in the feedback result. The core issue which results from the above findings is that of perception. TCU's staff perceive SET as something they must do to comply with the government's regulations rather than an effective tool for developing training quality, personnel management and for other purposes.

### 5.3.2 Students And University Staff Meeting

Besides formal student evaluation of teachers and institution-level satisfaction survey, TCU also implement students and university staff meeting as another tool to collect students' opinions.

Characteristics	Faculty-level meeting	Institution-level meeting
Participants	Students (on voluntary basis) Lecturers (compulsory) Dean and Deputy Dean (compulsory) Secretary (compulsory)	Students (on voluntary basis) Representatives of each faculty and offices University's board of management
Content	Q&A and student feedback regarding courses, teaching and student activities within faculty	Q&A and student feedback regarding courses, teaching, student activities, and university services
Objectives	To hear and to respond to students' concern and feedback about matters related to faculty	To hear and to respond to students' concern and feedback about matters related to faculty
Timing	Around the middle of the semester	Around the middle of the semester and after the faculty meeting

Table 5: Overview of the two types of students and university staff meeting

Table 5 above is the author's endeavour to give readers a clearer description of the current practice of meeting between students and university staff based on interview data. The author will now discuss some emerging issues regarding the characteristics of these meetings in TCU.

### Atmosphere

Little and Williams (2010, p. 124) discovered that students will be more eager to give their views on the programs or other issues if their feedback is not considered as a threat to any staff or students' own academic performance. In other words, by creating a friendly and constructive atmosphere, students will be more comfortable in contributing their input, and staff will receive student feedback in a less defensive manner. Unfortunately, both interviewed students and staff have negative opinions toward the atmosphere of these meetings.

R8, a current student, for instance, made this remark:

*We are quite afraid to raise our concerns, especially when they are certain teachers. We think the staff would hate us if we give negative feedback about them. Any student in my class who can speak his mind freely would be considered a "hero" (Personal communication, March 20, 2015).*

R9, a former student, further explained like this:

*Apart from being scared of possibly damaging our relationship with staff, we felt that if we raised any concerns, the faculty's managers would challenge us back in a very defensive manner, rather than acknowledge the problems we are trying to present to them. (Personal communication, March 19, 2015).*

Regarding the attitude of the staff, one teacher, R4, had this confession to make:

*We are really anxious every time the faculty or university holds a meeting. We are afraid that we may lose our face if students report something bad about us. As a result, we listen to student feedback in a defensive rather than open manner. (Personal communication, March 03, 2015).*

What can be inferred from responses from both staff and students is that the core reason behind the negative atmosphere is how students and staff discern these meetings. More specifically, both students and staff perceive these meetings as "a trial court", rather than an open discussion for quality improvement.

Taken together, these results suggest that both students and staff consider the oral feedback sessions as something which is threatening rather than beneficial to them. As a result, the

atmosphere of these meetings is often so intense that it inhibits interactive communication between students and staff.

## **Content**

As can be seen in the table, both meetings share similar content, which include a Q&A session and a feedback session. Although it may help save time and cost for the university, this practice poses some challenges regarding frustration of students. In this matter, R8, had this to say:

*Some students come to the meeting to ask questions, while others come only to offer their feedback. As a result, we usually have to wait a long time for our turn. Also, the content of the Q&A session is almost the same one semester after another, which makes us feel tired of hearing things again. (Personal communication, March 20 ,2015)*

In order to make these meetings more effective, it is suggested that TCU hold the Q&A session and the feedback session separately. This would help reduce the waiting time, and also avoid unnecessary repetition of information .

## **Participants**

It is worth noting that student representatives are not present in these student-university staff meetings. Actually, while the mechanism of student representatives is the norm in many HE institutions, it is not necessarily the case for TCU. Instead, TCU used to choose one teacher to represent one class. This position was called student counselor in TCU. This student counselor acts as a bridge between students and university staff. Before every meeting, students of each class could first raise their questions and concerns to the designated student counselor. The student counselor would respond to these if they were in their knowledge and capacity. Any questions or concerns which were not within their knowledge and capacity would be summarized and reported to faculty and university's board of management before the scheduled date of the meeting. The mechanism of student counselor, however, was abolished in 2014. In this regard, R3, a former faculty secretary, made this comment:

*TCU had to remove the mechanism of student counsel because of the extra money paid to this position and because it was not effective. Student counsels were usually busy with*

*their teaching workload and they usually refer the students to another person or level for consultation. (Personal communication, March 18, 2015.)*

Based on R3's observation, it was relatively reasonable for TCU to abolish the mechanism of student council. However, there should be someone standing between students and university staff. Brennan and Williams (2004, p. 43) treasured the role of student representative by highlighting the importance of their presence as an indication of student engagement and also their high motivation in the job. In addition, given the typically large number of students in each TCU class, it would be wise to use someone to collect and summarize students' views. This will not only save time spent on meetings but also enable the administrative staff to analyse the feedback in a more systematic way.

Regarding teachers' participation in these meetings at TCU, their compulsory attendance may not be necessary since they are relatively busy with their teaching workloads. Also, their presence is like to make students uncomfortable when giving their feedback. R4, for instance, had this to say:

*My students are reluctant to give straightforward feedback if they see any of their teachers sitting in front of them in the meeting room. (Personal communication, March 03, 2015.)*

In terms of participants, by and large, it is suggested that TCU should consider using the mechanism of student representatives to aid the interaction between the university and students, and that teachers should also attend these meetings. In meetings at faculty level meeting, for instance, there should be the presence of only student representatives and faculty's board of management.

### **Summary of findings – student and university staff meeting instrument**

After analyzing the student and university staff meeting instrument regarding the participants, atmosphere and contents, the following issues stand out. In terms of participants, the use of student representatives in aiding communication between university staff and students has not been realized. Furthermore, the presence of too many unnecessary stakeholders in these meetings has adversely affected the student's oral feedback. Regarding the content, holding Q&A and

feedback sessions together in one meeting have also prevented students from raising their concerns freely. Finally, the atmosphere of these meetings appears relatively negative. Rather than considering these meetings as a meaningful and constructive conversation between students and university staff, both of them perceive these meetings as a “ blame game” where one side reports mistakes or weaknesses and the other side try to defend themselves.

## 5.4 Actions And Decision-Making

Let us move on to discuss actions and decision-making after TCU collect student feedback through the above mechanisms. Unfortunately, because there is not any official document issued by TCU which serves as guidelines for the use of each instrument, the following description is mainly personal communication between the authors and the interviewees.

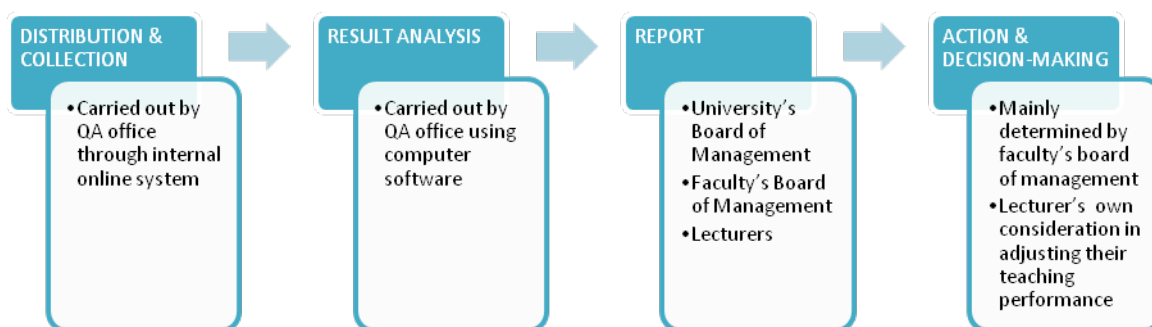


Figure 4 - Student evaluations of teaching cycle

Figure 4 captures the whole SET cycle in TCU. Once SETs are distributed to students at the end of the semester, they are collected and analyzed by the quality assurance office. At this phase, the QA staff will only pay attention to teachers with low ratings. The names of the low-rated teachers will be recorded in a special list which will later be reported and checked for any rating improvement in the following semester. The outcomes of the feedback are then reported the faculty's BOM, university's BOM and to individual lecturers. As for the university's BOM, they will receive two separate files, one containing the ratings of all university teachers and the other

containing the feedback outcomes of low-rated teachers. As for faculty's BOM, they will only receive the ratings of all their lecturers. Also, each lecturer will be informed of their own ratings.

The decision-making and follow-up actions are mainly determined by the faculty's BOM and individual lecturers. There are almost no decisions made or follow-up actions taken by the university's BOM upon the ratings. Even at the faculty level, the actions taken are not really clear or determinant. Only teachers with very low ratings will be warned and consulted. In this matter, R4, a former deputy dean, had this to say:

*There are actually no rewards or incentives of any kind for teachers who received high ratings. As for teachers who received low ratings for several semesters in a row, I may choose to do some class observations or give them some encouraging and constructive feedback. It's utterly up to the faculty's BOM or myself to decide what to do with these teachers. We may warn or threaten them, but actually hardly any real actions are executed. (Personal communication, March 03, 2015).*

Fortunately, for each individual teacher in TCU, although their teaching ratings may not affect their jobs, the ratings enable them to reflect on their current performance. All the teachers interviewed agreed that the outcome of the rating can serve as a precious source of information which helps to improve their teaching.

The foregoing discussion implies that the follow-up actions or the absence of them depends on teachers. If the teachers do something, they will do on a volutary basis. They may or may not consider to adjust their teaching performance. And this is because what the faculty or the university can do is very limited. As a result, their teachers are under little or no pressure to change.

The findings about the reality of the practice of SET in TCU support previous research about quality crisis in the Vietnamese HE. As observed by Vallely and Wilkinson (2008, p. 4) the promotion criteria in the Vietnamese HE are not based on academic or professional abilities, but mainly "on seniority, family and political background, and personal connections". Consequently, university teachers are not afraid about their low-rated teaching performance. Obviously, the ratings from students do not mean much to the career path of a teacher.

Further commenting on the effectiveness of the utilization of SET in TCU, it should be noted that there is a feedback loop in the SET cycle. Evidently, no clear actions or changes can be seen as resulting from the outcomes of SET. The issue has been widely discussed in previous study. The result of the SET ratings is merely a piece of information which may have no value if there are no follow-up actions. In order to complete the cycle of SET, Harvey (2003, p. 18) recommended that institutions need to ensure that some action is taken to resolve and monitor the problems identified by those appraisals. Without actions, the consequence of the feedback loop is substantial. Powney and Hall (1998) argued that “without evident action, students grow cynical about the process and are less willing to take part in the quality enhancement process” (as cited in Harvey, 2010, p. 4). In other words, if students do not witness any changes or consideration of changes from the faculty staff, they will become pessimistic towards the use of SETs and less motivated to participate in doing it in the subsequent semesters. All interviewed students tallied with this prediction. R8, for instance, made this remark:

*My classmates and I had no ideas of what my teachers or the university are going to do with our feedback. Occasionally a teacher is seen doing something to adjust their teaching a little bit. But usually we don't put much thought in filling out the SET forms. (Personal communication, March 20, 2015).*

In summary, the responses evidently prove that the SET feedback cycle in TCU has not been completed properly. There is a need to further clarify and implement follow-up actions in order for SET to achieve its intended purposes. Otherwise, student evaluations of teaching in TCU may only appear to be a bureaucratic procedure which does not bring about any practical outcomes.

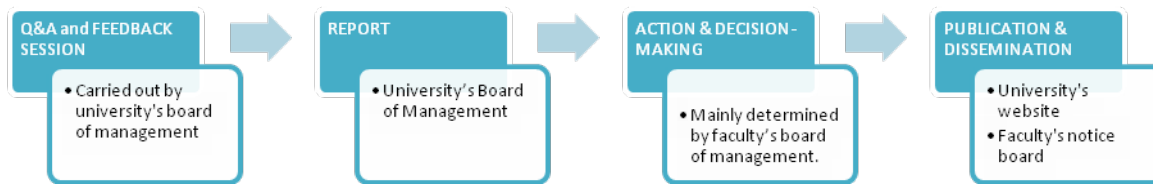


Figure 5 Feedback cycle of Student and university staff meeting

Figure 5 demonstrates the feedback cycle of a SAS meeting. All the oral feedback will be transcribed by a designated secretary. She will then send this document to the university's board of management. The university's BOM then determines what actions should or should not be taken upon the feedback. Most of the time, the university's BOM will consult with the related units before making a decision. Unfortunately, this step appears to be relatively fuzzy. According to R3,

*It is very hard to pinpoint specific actions as resulting from the SAS meetings. The university's BOM have their difficulties too since there are no actual documented guidelines about what to do with the results of the SAS meeting. (Personal communication, March 18, 2015).*

R3 is not the only one who has doubts about the follow-up actions for the SAS meeting in TCU. 6 out of 9 interviewees had negative feelings towards the outcomes of these meetings. However, it should be acknowledged that the university's BOM may value the need for follow-up actions, but they lack guidelines to do so. Unlike SET, the feedback collected in these meetings are related to a wide of university services which need further cooperation and consultation with the related units. Dealing with feedback concerning with security of a dormitory, for instance, needs the participation from the security department. The university's BOM cannot make any decision based solely on their own judgement. However, as mentioned by R3, there is a lack of specific



guidelines in dealing with this matter. Hence, the university's BOM may find it difficult to be able to clearly define their responsibility and those of other departments. Conceptually, there should be a clear segregation of duty when considering and executing follow-up actions taken upon student feedback.

In conclusion, the findings lend support to the claim that the latter stages of the instrument of the SAS meeting are somehow ambiguous. In TCU, there is an absence of guidelines or procedures which help to clarify the duties of each department and office in taking any follow-up actions and in the decision-making process.

### **Summary of Findings - Actions and Decision-Making**

The above analysis has depicted and discussed the current practice regarding actions and decision-making after the collection of student feedback in TCU. As concluded by Harvey (2003, p. 4), in order for the student feedback to be useful for the quality enhancement, "views of students need to be integrated into a regular and continuous cycle of analysis, reporting, action and feedback." Unfortunately, it is clear that the student feedback cycle in TCU is not complete yet. The responses evidently show that there is a loop between student feedback and follow-up actions in TCU. Nonetheless, it should be acknowledged that TCU's staff recognize the need to take actions in response to the feedback. In order to complete the student feedback cycle in TCU, there is a need to produce a set of specific guidelines or procedures which clearly defines what to do with student feedback results. In addition, there should be clarity in the responsibility and authority of each unit in TCU when tackling the problems emerging from students' feedback.

### **5.5 Publication And Dissemination**

Publication and dissemination of feedback outcomes is often as the final phase of the feedback cycle. Regarding this matter, as can be seen from the two diagrams above, this final phase is absent in the SET cycle. The outcome of this instrument depends on each individual teacher, the faculty's and the university's BOM. Thus, the question is why it is the results of the feedback

sessions and of the institution-level satisfaction questionnaires, but not SET, which get published. To explain this interesting matter, R1, had this to say:

*Usually for the feedback sessions, students' opinions are mainly related to the university's services. There is hardly any citing of names of particular teachers or staff. As for the SET, we are afraid if we published the outcomes those teachers with low ratings would feel they were losing their face.. You know, for a teacher, honor or face keeping is almost everything. (Personal communication, March 20, 2015).*

This explanation is relatively persuasive. Moreover, the SET outcome is not usually published partly because the results of the student evaluations of teaching are not always true. The two arguments bring the readers back to the controversial issue of student feedback publication and dissemination. Brennan and Williams (2004, p. 53) believed that feedback to students is just as vital as feedback from students. And Keane and Labhrainn (2005, p.12) also believed that student's motivation in joining future evaluation will be lower if they do not receive any feedback on the result of the evaluation process. On the other side of the debate, Williams (2002) feared that the publication of the student feedback outcome may adversely affect the reputation of an institution and may eventually influence the choice-making process of prospective students and parents. (as cited in Harvey, 2003, p. 5). Moreover, although this is not necessarily the case of TCU, it is imperative to note that the time lag between the collection of feedback and the follow-up action is also one of the reasons for publishing the feedback outcome. What is surprising is that when analysing the staff responses regarding this issue, 3 out of 4 university staff were well aware of this controversial issues. In fact, they even offered a solution. R1, for instance, opined:

*We can just go ahead to publish the result of the feedback sessions. But I don't think students need to know everything about the result. Maybe they just need to know a little bit about what is going on, or what actions will possibly be taken. (Personal communication, March 20, 2015)*

TCU's practice of editing the outcome report may be in fact a good practice. According to Keane and Labhrainn (2005, p. 12), "the information fed back to students need not be detailed in nature – a list of bullet points summarizing the key issues, main findings and actions to be taken will

often suffice.” Obviously, this piece of advice does not necessarily imply that university should lie in their public report.

The above debate may lead us to another issue related to the feeding back of the results to students. What should be presented in student feedback report? Harvey (2003, p. 7) stresses that “feedback to students is not just telling them the results, but telling them what follow-up actions have been taken”.

However, the actual practice in TCU seems to contradict the above suggestion. From the document review, the author discovered that the report of the student feedback outcome which is made public only contains the key issues addressed in the feedback sessions. Unfortunately, actions which have been taken or will be taken are not mentioned at all in the report. From a legal standpoint, R1, made this comment:

*The government only requires us to collect student feedback regularly, and to send the report only to the university’s board of management and related units. It does not require us to publish the student feedback compulsory.* (Personal communication, March 20, 2015).

The above opinion lends further support to the claim that the practice of student feedback mechanisms in TCU is regarded as the university’s efforts in complying with the government’s regulations rather than its devotion to quality enhancement.

### **Summary of findings - Publication and Dissemination**

Like many universities in the world, TCU is besieged by a number of challenging issues regarding the publication and dissemination of student feedback. Firstly, there is a need to solve the conflict of interest between university’s benefits from the marketing perspective and students’ benefits from the quality improvement perspective. Secondly, TCU does not take possible follow-up actions into account when composing the feedback report. These are the two key issues that TCU needs to continue to work on.

### **5.6 Findings Conclusion**

The above discussion has captured the overall picture of the execution of student feedback mechanisms in TCU as well as compared the findings with the relevant literature. Firstly, empirical data evidently shows that the functions of student feedback in TCU are limited. Broadly speaking, the establishment of student feedback mechanisms TCU is more of compliance with regulations than of enhancing the quality of training. With regard to the two instruments, it should be noticed that both university staff and students may not be cognizant of the importance of these instruments as well as their active and proper participation. This leads to the low reliability of student's input as well as the resulting effects. In terms of publication and dissemination, TCU staff do not make sufficient efforts in reporting the feedback results to students and to stakeholders. However, it is worth noting that like many other universities, TCU has to cope with a conflict of interest when dealing with this issue. Finally, what can be observed in each stage of the student feedback cycle of TCU is that there is a lack of official and specific guidelines or procedures in executing the necessary actions. All in all, it can be concluded that the practice of student feedback mechanisms in TCU is still at its early stage of development and needs a great deal of work for further improvement.

## **Chapter 6 - Conclusion and Implications**

### **6.1 Revisiting The Research Questions**

By returning briefly to the research questions set out at the beginning of this thesis, the author will be able to describe more concisely the overall picture which the study has uncovered. A brief summary of the discussion is presented as follows:

*What are student feedback mechanisms?*

Through reviewing the relevant literature, the study has been able to provide answers to this question. Most of the previous studies regarding the functions, characteristics as well as the cycle of the student feedback mechanisms are put under scrutiny. For each aspect of the student feedback mechanisms, the study not only describes the result of previous research but also offers critical assessment where applicable. It is relatively clear that student feedback plays a pivotal role in the whole quality assurance process. Additionally, the study identifies the two following overarching major observations. Firstly, there are some differences between the theoretical notion of the student feedback process and how it is typically executed in reality. Secondly, there is no concrete guideline regarding how exactly student feedback mechanisms should be executed. It depends on the existing infrastructure and the strategic goals regarding the QA process of each university.

*How are student feedback mechanisms executed in TCU?*

Given the fact that quality assurance in Vietnamese higher education is at its early stage, the study aims to explore the current execution of student feedback mechanisms in a university. The empirical findings show that student feedback mechanisms have been formally installed in TCU, however, there are a number of challenges which TCU needs to deal with. Firstly, the functions of these mechanisms in TCU are relatively limited. The university has not utilized these instruments as a way to supervise and develop their staff, and as a valuable source of information for the improvement of university services. Secondly, the students' awareness of the importance of student feedback mechanisms and their proper input is proved to be very low. Thirdly, the use of SET survey in TCU such as timing, response rate and incentives poses a question of reliability. Mandatory participation from students may contribute to the fact that

TCU students do not necessarily express their true opinions towards the teaching performance. Fourthly, speaking of the other main instrument being used in TCU, university student and staff meeting, the most striking result emerging from the data is that both students and staff find this instrument threatening to their benefits rather than a constructive conversation between customer and service provider with the aim to improve the quality of services. Fifthly, speaking of the actions and the decision-making process, TCU has not thoroughly taken into account the student feedback result when executing new policies or changes. It is also difficult to link the student feedback result with the actions taken. Finally, student feedback results are not reported back to students. Even when TCU does this, it does not disclose the university's next actions. And it should be noted that TCU lacks official documented guidelines or instructions regarding the execution of the whole student feedback process.

In general, TCU, in compliance with the government's regulations in relation to about internal quality management, has installed the student feedback mechanisms inside their university. Unfortunately, it seems that these instruments have not significantly contributed to the overall improvement of quality of training. In TCU, these instruments seem to be considered as a bureaucratic procedure rather than a useful source of information for the quality assurance process.

## **6.2 Implications for Further Improvement**

Given the practice of student feedback in TCU, the current situation of TCU as well as the suggestions from the literature review, the author attempts to offer suggestions for improving the effectiveness of these mechanisms in TCU. Firstly, the overall suggestions based on the emerging issues are presented. Secondly, practical and specific actions for each instrument are described.

### **6.2.1 Overall Suggestions**

The overall suggestions come from the core problems which have been identified during the above discussion. Specifically, one of the core problems in TCU's student feedback mechanisms originates from how university staff and students perceive the functions of collecting students' views. In essence, university staff and students should be aware of the potential benefits which

lead to the improvement in training quality, rather than consider the whole process merely as bureaucratic procedures or regulations which need their compliance. Secondly, university staff should make efforts in producing a formal internal framework or protocol which dictates the procedures of the follow-up actions. This will help not only to reduce confusion on the part of the university staff when dealing with the student feedback outcome but also increase the level of transparency of the whole process. Thirdly, for a stable development of student feedback mechanisms in particular and QA process as a whole, it is necessary that TCU provide formal QA training to the relevant staff as well as the BOM of the university and each faculty.

### **6.2.2 Specific Suggestions**

#### **Student evaluations of teaching instrument**

Firstly, TCU's SET questionnaires should adopt more dimensions used in SET design. Learning outcome, for instance, should be incorporated in the content of SET's questionnaires. This dimension is supposed to help learners reflect on their learning competencies. However, it should be noticed that TCU should, at the same time, include necessary dimensions depending on their purposes without making the questionnaires too lengthy.

Secondly, for higher reliability of the student response, TCU should make various efforts to increase the awareness of students about the importance of their proper and faithful engagement in the student feedback process. Ideally, TCU should be more willing to participate in the SET survey, rather than be forced to do so. More specifically, TCU should organize workshops and information sessions which aim to equip their students with a better insight into how student feedback can contribute to the improvement of training quality. As a result of these actions, students will be more motivated to participate faithfully and properly in the mechanisms, which may eventually increase the reliability of their input.

Similarly, university and faculty's BOM need to take the SET results more seriously. TCU should define clearly the possible influence of student feedback results on teachers in terms of employment, promotion and professional development. To put it another way, issues associated with teacher employment should realign with teacher's ratings and other performance indicators. This will help to increase the teachers' motivation in improving their teaching performance.

Regarding the final stage of the SET cycle, teachers should make it known to their students that they have taken into consideration the student's comments and ratings and that they have made appropriate adjustments to their teaching performance, if any. This action will result in the following two effects. Firstly, it may trigger students' motivation in participating in the quality assurance process. Secondly, it can create in teachers a better sense of accountability for their performance.

### **Students and university staff meeting instrument**

In order to increase the actual student involvement in the QA process and to aid the communication between students and university staff, TCU should consider implementing the mechanism of student representatives in this instrument. Moreover, given the situation of large classes in TCU, the use of student representation is good for saving time and effort in collecting and analyzing student oral feedback.

It is also suggested that teachers should not be present in the meetings between the faculty staff and students. Instead, they should participate in the follow-up phases. This will help to generate a more comfortable condition for students to raise their voice.

With regard to follow-up actions, there should be prescribed internal guidelines clearly defining the duties of each unit in the university, which aims to increase the management capacity in tackling problems emerging from meetings with students. This will help to speed up the actions and the decision-making stages and to create better leadership in the institution.

It is additionally recommended that TCU inform the students of the actions resulting from the feedback, or at least publicly explain why the university staff act or do not act upon the feedback. This action, again, may enhance student's willingness to involve in the QA process.

Lastly and most importantly, student and university staff should perceive this instrument as a means to create constructive conversations between the customers and the service providers, which aims to enhance the university services, rather than to pinpoint and blame any weaknesses or misconduct on anyone. This change of attitude often results in more open communication between students and university. Ultimately, TCU can obtain greater contribution from students and staff to the QA process.



### **6.3 Suggestions for future studies**

This study investigated the current practice of student feedback mechanisms in TCU. The interview data comes from a wide range of perspectives: QA staff, faculty's BOM, teachers and students. It is worth noting that the data analysis mentioned some contrast between how students and university staff perceive the role and the practice of student feedback inside their university. However, due to the time constraint, this study merely noticed this phenomenon but did not go further to explain it. Hence, it would be interesting to explore and explain the differences and similarities regarding how students and university staff perceive student feedback mechanisms.

Another critical aspect of the topic of student feedback which has not been studied in this study is how the case university incorporates the collection of data from their faculties and offices and how it and these sub-units act as a result. It is recommended that future studies examine this incorporation and come up with a framework for a better coordination among university sub-units in utilizing student feedback mechanisms.

Finally, as defined in the “Scope of the study“ section, this research examines the execution of student feedback in the undergraduate training of the case university. Other areas of training such as graduate, short courses training have been excluded. Thus, future research should further examine the practice of student feedback in these areas and how the university can integrate the outcome of student feedback in all the levels and types of training. And, as will be mentioned in the limitations of the study, the survey in this case study should be replicated in a bigger number of HE institutions in Vietnam so that the conclusions drawn will be more convincing.

### **6.4 Limitations of the study**

The study only used a single case university as an example to demonstrate how student feedback mechanisms have been executed in Vietnamese state-funded universities. Therefore, the findings of the study cannot be seen as representing the practice of student feedback in all the state-funded universities of the country. However, the study offers valuable insight into an under – researched topic - the execution of student feedback in developing countries.

Another weakness of this study was the paucity of empirical data. As mentioned in the research design, data gathered in this research mainly come from interviews with 9 participants. Although a number of different perspectives from different stakeholders such as students, lecturers, faculty's BOM and quality assurance staff were taken into account, the study did not indicate the views of other important stakeholders such as senior management, parents and external QA agencies. This fact may have affected the analytical depth and validity of the study.

## References

- Arksey, H., & Knight, P. T. (1999). *Interviewing for Social Scientists: An Introductory Resource with Examples*. London: Sage.
- Beresford, M. (2010). *Legal Reforms in China and Vietnam: A Comparison of Asian Communist Regimes*. Taylor & Francis e-Library.
- Biggam, J. (2011). *Succeeding with your dissertation*. Open University Press.
- Brennan, J., & Williams, R. (2004). *Collecting and using student feedback* (Learning and Teaching Support Network ed.).
- Clark, N. (2010). *Higher Education in Vietnam: Student Growth, Faculty Shortages and International Partnerships*. Retrieved from World Education and Reviews: <http://wenr.wes.org/2010/08/wenr-julyaugust-2010-practical-information/>
- Clark, N. (2014). *Higher Education in Vietnam*. Retrieved March 12, 2015, from World Education News and Reviews: <http://wenr.wes.org/2014/05/higher-education-in-vietnam/>
- Clark, N. (2010). Higher Education in Vietnam: Student Growth, Faculty Shortages and International Partnerships. *World Education News & Reviews*.
- Dang, A. Q. (2009). *Recent Higher Education Reforms in Vietnam: The Role of the World Bank*. Education, Policy and Organisation in the Knowledge Economy.
- Elliot, K. M., & Healy, M. A. (2001). Key factors influencing student satisfaction related to recruitment and retention. *Journal of Marketing for Higher Education*, 10(4), 1-11.
- Frank, Z. (2008). *Budgeting and Funding as Elements of New Public Management*.
- Frazer, M. (1997). Quality Assurance in Higher Education. In A. Craft, *Quality Assurance in Higher Education* (p. 10).
- Freebody, P. (2003). *Qualitative Research in Education : Interaction and Practice*. SAGE Publications.

- Grebennikov, L., & Shah, M. (2013). Monitoring Trends in Student Satisfaction. *Tertiary Education and Management*, 19(4), 301-322.
- Gou, S. (2006). *The Political Economy of Asian Transition from Communism*. UK: Ashgate Publishing Limited.
- Handwerk, P. G., Carson, C., & Blackwell, K. M. (2000). *On-Line vs. Paper-and-Pencil Surveying of Students: A Case Study*. AIR 2000 Annual Forum Paper. Annual Forum of the Association.
- Harman, G., Hayden, M., & Pham, N. T. (2010). Higher Education in Vietnam: Reform, Challenges and Priorities. In G. Harman, M. Hayden, & N. T. Pham, *Reforming Higher Education in Vietnam - Challenges and Priorities*. Springer.
- Harvey, L. (2001). *Getting student satisfaction*. Retrieved March 28, 2015, from The Guardian: <http://www.theguardian.com/education/2001/nov/27/students>
- Harvey, L. (2003). Student Feedback [1]. *Quality in Higher Education*, 9(1), 3-20.
- Hayden, M., & Dao, K. V. (2010). Private Higher Education in Vietnam. In G. Harman, M. Hayden, & N. T. Pham. Springer.
- Hill, F. M. (1995). Managing service quality in higher education: the role of the student as primary consumer. *Quality Assurance in Education*, 3(3), 10-21.
- Hunt, K. H. (1977). Conceptualization and Measurement of Consumer Satisfaction and Dissatisfaction. In K. H. Hunt, *Overview and Future Directions* (p. 49). Cambridge, MA: Marketing Science Institute.
- Keane, E., & Labhrainn, I. M. (2005). Obtaining Student Feedback on. Centre for Excellence in Learning & Teaching .
- Kember, D., Kwan, K. P., & Leung, D. Y. (2002). Does the use of student feedback questionnaires improve the overall quality of teaching? *Assessment and Evaluation in Higher Education*(27), 411-425.

- Lam , T. Q., & Hayden, M. (2010). Vietnam's Higher Education System. In M. Hayden, N. T. Pham, & G. Harman, *Reforming Higher Education in Vietnam : Challenges and Priorities* (pp. 15-30). Springer.
- Latham, B. (2007). Sampling: What is it? *Quantitative Research Methods - Texas Tech University*.
- Leckey , J., & Neill, N. (2001). Quantifying Quality: The importance of student feedback. *Quality in Higher Education*, 7(1), 19-32.
- Letcher, D. W., & Neves, J. S. (2010). Determinants of undergraduate business student satisfaction. *Research in Higher Education Journal*, 3.
- Little, B., & Williams, R. (2010). Students' Roles in Maintaining Quality and in Enhancing Learning: Is There a Tension? *Quality in Higher Education*, 16(2), 115-127.
- Mai, L. T. (2006). Student Evaluation At Vietnam National University - Hanoi. In V. Prasad, & J. Patil, *International Perspectives on Student Participation in Quality Enhancement* (pp. 67-82). International Conference on Student Participation in Quality Enhancement.
- Marsh, H. W. (1987). Students' evaluations of university teaching: research findings, methodological. *International Journal of Educational Research*, 253–388.
- Morton, L. P. (2002). Targeting Generation Y. (Segmenting Publics). *Public Relations Quarterly*, 47(2), 46-48.
- Mrozek, Z., Adjei, O., & Mansour, A. (1997). Quality Assurance in Higher Education. 156-164.
- Mugabi, H. (2014). Institutionalisation of the 'Third Mission' : The case of Makerere University. *Academic Dissertation*. University of Tampere.
- Nair, C., Adams, P., & Mertova, P. (2008). Student Engagement: The Key to Improving Survey Response Rates. *Quality in Higher Education*, 14(3), 225-232.
- Narasimhan, K. (2001). Improving the climate of teaching sessions: the use of evaluations by students and instructors. *Quality in Higher Education*, 7, 179-190.

- Nguyen, K. D., Oliver, D. E., & Priddy, L. E. (2009). Criteria for Accreditation in Vietnam's Higher Education: Focus on Input or Outcome? *Quality in Higher Education*, 123-134.
- Odom, L. R. (2008). Investigating the hypothesized factor structure of the noel-levitz.
- Oliver, R. L., & DeSarbo, W. S. (1989). Processing satisfaction response in consumption: A suggested framework and response proposition. *Journal of Consumer Satisfaction, Dissatisfaction, and Complaining Behavior*, 1-16.
- Pham, T. X. (2010). *Vietnam Country Report : Quality Assurance Development*. Japan- Asean Information Package.
- Porter, S. R., & Whitcomb, M. E. (2003). The Impact of Lottery Incentives on Student Survey Response Rates. *Research in Higher Education*, 44(4), 389-407.
- Powney, J., & Hall, S. (1998). Closing the Loop The Impact of Student Feedback on Students' Subsequent.
- Prasad, V. S., & Patil, J. (2007). International Perspectives on Student Participation in Quality Enhancement. In L. T. Mai, *Student Evaluation At Vietnam National* (pp. 67-71).
- Richardson, J. T. (2005). Instruments for obtaining student. *Assessment & Evaluation in Higher*, 30(4), 387-415.
- Rowley, J. (2003). Designing student feedback questionnaires. *Quality Assurance in Education*, 11(3), 142-149.
- Sabri, D. (2011). What's wrong with 'the student experience'? *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education*, 32(5).
- Sax, L. J., Gilmartin, S. K., & Bryant, A. N. (2003). Assessing Response Rates and Nonresponse Bias in Web and Paper Surveys. *Research in Higher Education*, 44(4), 409-432.
- Schmidt, W. C. (1997). World Wide Web survey research: Benefits, potential problems, and solutions. *Behavior Research Methods, Instruments & Computers*, 29(2), 274-279.

- Segers, M., & Dochy, F. (1996). Quality Assurance in Higher Education : Theoretical Considerations and Empirical Evidence. *Studies in Educational Evaluation*, 22(2), 115-137.
- Shenton, A. K. (2004). Strategies for ensuring trustworthiness in qualitative research projects. *Education for Information*(22), 63-75.
- Swoboda, W. J., Mühlberger, N., Weitkunt, R., & Schneeweiß, S. (1997). Internet Surveys by Direct Mailing : An Innovative Way of Collecting Data. *Social Science Computer Review*, 15, 242-255.
- Thiep, L. Q., & Hayden, M. (2010). Vietnam's Higher Education System. In G. Harman, M. Hayden, & N. T. Pham, *Reform Higher Education in Vietnam*. Springer.
- Vallely, T. J., & Wilkinson, B. (2008). Vietnamese Higher Education: Crisis and Response. *Higher Education Task Force*.
- Watson, S. (2003). Closing the feedback loop: Ensuring effective action from student feedback. *Tertiary Education and Management*, 9(2), 145-157.
- Welch, A. R. (2010). Internationalisation of Vietnamese Higher Education. In G. Harman, M. Hayden, & P. T. Nghi, *Reforming Higher Education in Vietnam: Challenges and Priorities*.
- Wiers-Jenssen, J., Stensaker, B., & Grogard, J. B. (2002). Student Satisfaction: towards an empirical deconstruction of the concept. *Quality in Higher Education*, 8, 183-195.
- Williams, J. (2013). *Consuming Higher Education - Why learning can't be bought*. Bloomsbury Publishing Plc.
- World Bank. (2008). *Vietnam: Higher Education and Skills for Growth*. Human Development Department - East Asia and Pacific Region - The World Bank.

## Web Sources

- Dien, A. (2013). *Vietnam higher education laid low*. Retrieved from Thanhnien news:  
<http://www.thanhniennews.com/index/pages/20130720-higher-education-laid-low.aspx>

- Farrelly, N. (2011). *Starting points: Vietnam in 1986*. Retrieved April 3, 2015, from Asia Pacific:  
<http://asiapacific.anu.edu.au/newmandala/2011/10/26/starting-points-vietnam-in-1986/>
- Gaddis, S. E. (1998). Retrieved February 23, 2015, from How to design on-line surveys:  
<https://www.questia.com/magazine/1G1-20860384/how-to-design-online-surveys>
- Wyse, S. E. (2014, October 15). *Advantages and Disadvantages of Face-to-Face Data Collection*. Retrieved March 29, 2015, from Snapsurveys:  
<http://www.snapsurveys.com/blog/advantages-disadvantages-facetoface-data-collection/>



## Appendix 1- Interview Guide

### *Interview themes*

- (1) Role of student feedback
- (2) Instruments of student feedback
- (3) Student feedback questionnaires
- (4) Student representation and other methods
- (5) Actions and decision-making
- (6) Publication
- (7) Overall assessments and suggestions

### *A. Interview questions for academic staff*

1. What is the role of student feedback in your university ?
2. Who are the main users of these feedback results?
3. At which level does the university use student feedback to evaluate quality ?
4. How do you comment on this?
5. How do you define student satisfaction in the context of your university ?
6. What are the current instruments of student feedback?
7. Are there any other instruments that the university plans to implement in the near future ?
8. What dimensions are being used in the survey and other instruments? How do you comment on those dimensions ?
9. What are the advantages and disadvantages of each instrument according to your experience?
10. At which time is student feedback survey normally issued? How do you comment about this?
11. How is the response rate? What are the reasons behind the low or high response rate ?
12. Do students know about the use and the importance of their input?
13. Can students and teachers access any information regarding the whole student feedback process?

14. How do you comment on the current practice of using paper and online questionnaires? (cost, process time, response rate, effectiveness and confidentiality of the feedback)
15. Do you carry out student evaluation of teachers yourself? How do you comment on this tool?
16. Does the university use student representatives as a source to collect students' views?
17. When and how often does the university carry out meetings with them? What is discussed in a typical meeting? Between who and who?
18. How do you comment on the effectiveness of these meetings and on student attitude during and towards these meetings?
19. How does the university respond to student feedback? Does it do it face-to-face? By email or other forms of correspondence?
20. How do you describe the student feedback cycle in your university? Is it time effective or not? Is your university currently trying to improve this cycle?
21. Once your university receives the feedback, are there any follow-up actions?
22. How does the university act upon the student feedback? Immediately or go through a number of levels before a decision is made?
23. Does the university feed the result back to the students, lecturers, and university officers?
24. How do you comment about the overall student feedback cycle of your university?
25. Do you have any suggestions on how to improve the effectiveness of the student feedback mechanisms in your university?

*B. Interview questions for quality assurance staff and student affairs staff*

1. What is the role of student feedback in your university?
2. Who are the main users of these feedback results?
3. At which level does the university use student feedback to evaluate quality?
4. Does your university follow any government's regulations in collecting student feedback?

5. Besides complying with government's regulations, does your university initiate and execute any other tools of student feedback mechanisms ?
6. How do you define student satisfaction in the context of your university?
7. What are the current instruments of student feedback ?
8. Are there any other instruments that the university plans to implement in the near future ?
9. What dimensions are being used in the survey and other instruments ? How do you comment about those dimensions ?
10. What are the advantages and disadvantages of each instrument according to your experience?
11. At which time is student feedback survey normally issued? How do you comment about this?
12. How is the response rate? What are the reasons behind the low or high response rate ?
13. Does the university use any incentives in carrying out questionnaires ?
14. Is your universities planning to implement any incentives in the near future?
15. Do students know about the use and the importance of their input?
16. Can students and teachers access any information regarding the whole student feedback process?
17. How do you comment about the current practice of using paper and online questionnaires ? (cost, process time, response rate, effectiveness and confidentiality of the feedback)
18. Does the university use student representatives as a source to collect student's view ?
19. How does the university respond to students feedback ? Does it do it face-to-face or By email or other forms of correspondence?
20. How do you describe the student feedback cycle in your university? Is this time effective or not? Is your university currently trying to improve this cycle?
21. If each department in your university normally carries out student feedback within their interest, how do you comment about integration and cooperation of these departments in terms of collecting and analyzing student view?
22. Does your department have a documented procedure in analyzing and reporting student feedback outcomes? Does other departments have access to these documents?

23. Once your university's board of management receives the feedback, are there any follow-up actions ?
24. How does the university act upon the student feedback? Immediately or go through a number of levels before a decision is made ?
25. Does the university feed the result back to the students, lecturers, and university officers?
26. How do you comment about the overall student feedback cycle of your university ?
27. What are the strengths and weaknesses of the current student feedback mechanisms in your university?
28. Do you have any suggestions on how to improve the effectiveness of the student feedback mechanisms in your university ?

*C. Interview questions for faculty managers*

1. What is the role of student feedback in your university and your faculty ?
2. Who are the main users of these feedback results?
3. How do you define student satisfaction in the context of your university?
4. What are the current instruments of student feedback?
5. Are there any other instruments that the university plans to implement in the near future ?
6. What dimensions are being used in the survey and other instruments? How do you comment about those dimensions ?
7. What are the advantages and disadvantages of each instrument according to your experience?
8. At which time is student feedback survey normally issued? How do you comment about this?
9. How is the response rate ? What are the reasons behind the low or high response rate ?
10. Do students know about the use and the importance of their input ?
11. Can students, teachers and faculty managers access any information regarding the whole student feedback process?

12. How do you comment about the current practice of using paper and online questionnaires ? (cost, process time, response rate, effectiveness and confidentiality of the feedback)
13. Do your teachers carry out student's evaluation of teachers by themselves? How do you comment about this tool?
14. How often and when does the faculty carry out meetings with students ? What is the content of the meeting? Between who and who ?
15. How do you comment about the effectiveness of these meetings and about the student attitude during and towards these meetings ?
16. How do the university and your faculty respond to student feedback ? Do they do it face-to-face or by email or forms of correspondence?
17. How do you describe the student feedback cycle in your university ? Is this time effective or not? Is your university currently trying to improve this cycle?
18. Once your faculty receives the feedback, are there any follow-up actions ?
19. How does the faculty act upon the student feedback ? Immediately or go through a number of levels before a decision is made ?
20. Does the university and your faculty feed the result back to the students, lecturers, and university officers?
21. How do you comment about the overall student feedback cycle of your university ?
22. What are the strengths and weaknesses of the current student feedback mechanisms in your university and faculty?
23. Do you have any suggestions on how to improve the effectiveness of the student feedback mechanisms in your university and in your faculty ?

*D. Interview questions for students*

1. What is the role of student feedback in your university ?
2. At which level does the university use student feedback to evaluate quality ?
3. What are the current instruments of student feedback ?

4. What dimensions are being used in the survey and other instruments? How do you comment about those dimensions?
5. What are the advantages and disadvantages of each instrument according to your experience?
6. At which time is student feedback survey normally issued? How do you comment about this?
7. Do you know about the use and the importance of your input ?
8. Do you fill out questionnaires properly and honestly?
9. Do your teachers carry out student's evaluation of teachers by themselves? How do you comment about this tool? Do you notice any changes in teachers' performance as a result of the evaluation?
10. Does the university use student representatives as a source to collect student's view ?
11. When and how often does the university carry out meetings with them ? What is discussed in a typical meeting? Between who and who?
12. How do you comment about the effectiveness of these meetings and about your attitude during and towards these meetings ?
13. How does the university respond to your feedback ? Does it do it face-to-face or by email or forms of correspondence?
14. Do you notice any changes of policies regarding your input ?
15. Once your university receives the feedback, are there any follow-up actions ?
16. Does the university, faculty and teachers inform you of the outcomes of your feedback?
17. Does the university feed the result back to you ?
18. How do you comment about the overall student feedback cycle of your university ?
19. Do you have any suggestions on how to improve the effectiveness of the student feedback mechanisms in your university ?

## Appendix 2- Interviewee List

No.	Current Position	Ex-Position
1	Quality Assurance Specialist	
2	Head of Public and Enterprise Relations	Head of Student Affair Office
3	PR Specialist	Faculty Secretary
4	PhD Candidate	Lecturer and Deputy Dean
5	PhD Candidate	Lecturer
6	Lecturer	Lecturer & Student Counselor
7	Lecturer	
8	Student	
9	PR specialist	Former student

All the first seven participants are either working or used to work for the case university. As for the other two students, one has finished her study at the case university and is now working for the case university, the other is currently in his final year at the case university. The numbering in the table corresponds to the respondent number mentioned in the thesis.